COMBAT AIRCRAFT 113

Warren Thompson

F-51 MUSTANG UNITS OF THE KOREAN WAR

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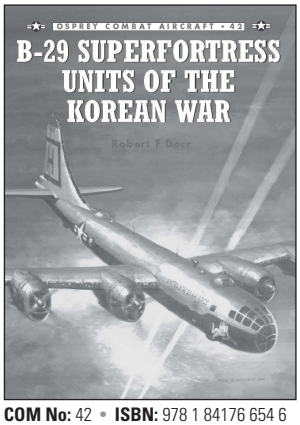

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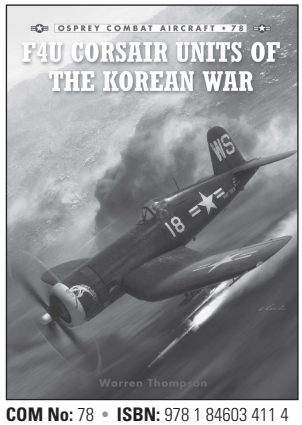

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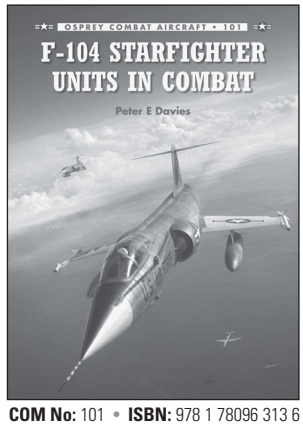

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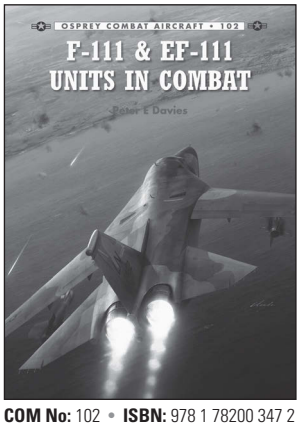

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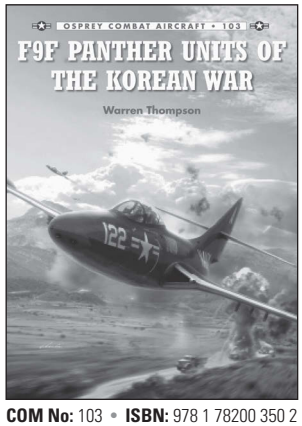

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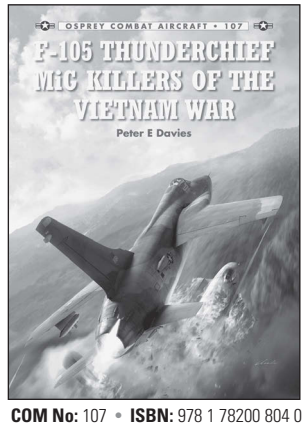

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SERIES EDITOR TONY HOLMES

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Front Cover

During the morning of 14 August 1951, the 18th Fighter-Bomber Group's 39th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron successfully attacked targets in Pyongyang, despite the North Korean capital being heavily defended by myriad flak batteries. Amongst the aircraft to participate in this daring mission was F-51D 44-74597 *SEXY SALLY II*, flown by the squadron CO, Maj Murrit H Davis. Having dropped his napalm canisters at low level, he then led his element home.

Davis returned to Pyongyang a few hours later, as recounted in the citation that accompanied the Silver Star that was awarded to him posthumously after the mission;

'Maj Davis led a flight of 12 F-51 type aircraft on a mission over Korea. He displayed outstanding airmanship and exceptional heroism by leading his squadron over the heavily defended city of Pyongyang, where a devastating low-level napalm attack was made against supply warehouses in that city. Two of his pilots were shot down by enemy fire and his own aircraft was heavily damaged. Despite the intensity of enemy opposition, Maj Davis pulled away from his squadron and circled the target area, repeatedly attempting to locate the downed pilots. After an exhaustive search, he reassembled his squadron over the designated rendezvous point and led them in the direction of home. Approximately ten minutes after leaving the target area, his aircraft's engine failed. Maj Davis jettisoned his canopy, after which his aircraft was seen to enter a spiral to the left, before crashing into the ground and exploding' (*Cover art by Gareth Hector*)

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INTRODUCTION

With the ending of World War 2 the Korean Peninsula became a major problem in that the South had a separate State, and by August 1948 it was established as the Republic of Korea (ROK) under the leadership of Syngman Rhee. A month later North Korea became a communist country led by Kim Il Sung. The North began a huge armament build-up, with tanks and aircraft being donated to the new nation by the Soviet Union. The governments of the ROK and the USA were totally unaware of this. In fact, during the summer of 1949, the Americans withdrew the remainder of their troops.

The feeling among the top military leaders in the USA was that the defence of South Korea was not within their defensive perimeters in the Pacific regions, American forces being mainly used to protect Formosa, Japan and Okinawa. This decision alone convinced the communist regime that it should attempt to take over South Korea.

In the conflict that ensued, World War 2 fighter aircraft such as the Vought F4U Corsair and North American F-51 Mustang found themselves at the forefront of the first major campaign of the Cold War. When the Korean War commenced in late June 1950, the vast majority of the USAF's piston-engined fighters still in service equipped stateside Air National Guard (ANG) or United States Air Force Reserves (AFRes) units. However, the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star had been replacing the piston-engined fighters of frontline air groups in the Far East, resulting in most Mustangs having

been sent back to the USA. Just a few F-51s remained, these aircraft being used in the training of Republic of Korea Air Force (RoKAF) personnel.

With few USAF combat aircraft in South Korea at the time of the invasion, it fell to the North American F-82G Twin Mustang to bear the brunt of the attack, especially in defending Kimpo (K-14) while all American and key South Korean families were evacuated by Douglas C-54s. The F-80s flying in from Itazuke Air Base (AB), in Japan, provided some protection for the evacuation effort, but because they could not land at the crude air bases in South Korea their loiter times over the target areas were limited. No missions were flown north of the 38th Parallel at this early stage in the conflict, the USA being totally unprepared for a major conflict in the Far East. Indeed, all of its interest was in Western Europe, countering Soviet threats with operations such as the Berlin Airlift.

The F-80 was represented on Okinawa and at several air bases in Japan, as the USAF's fighter units had just about completed their conversion to an all-jet interceptor force in the Far East. Moreover, there had been no preparations in South Korea to improve any of the air bases to accept jet fighters because there was no need to do so. This left only the C-54s and F-82s capable of operating from Kimpo airfield. Fortunately, the aircraft carrier USS *Valley Forge* (CV-45) was docked in Hong Kong when the war started, and it was carrying two squadrons of F4U-4Bs. It immediately set sail for South Korea (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 78 – F4U Corsair Units of the Korean War* for further details). The only thing lacking was a sizeable force of Mustangs, and this shortfall would soon be rectified. In the meantime, the existing forces in Japan would have to hold on until the F-51s arrived.

A narrative by 36th Fighter-Bomber Squadron (FBS) commanding officer (CO) Lt Col Bill O'Donnell, who flew Mustangs during the early days of the conflict, describes how the F-51 fitted well in Korea, even though it did not represent the jet age. Media emphasis was focused on the F-80 because it represented the dawn of a new age in military aviation, but there were still plenty of unknowns when it came to employing jets in a combat environment. This was not the case with the veteran F-51 Mustang and F4U Corsair, and this made both types highly desirable during the early months of the conflict because they could carry large amounts of ordnance, use the rough runways that predominated in Korea and be easily maintained. They operated at 'full bore' up to the Yalu River and still had plenty of loiter time, unlike the F-80s, which did not yet have sufficient range. The era of the Mustang in combat in Korea would last until late December 1952.

CHAPTER ONE

MUSTANGS GET INVOLVED IN THE WAR

While the ANG and AFRes Mustangs were being hastily rounded up in the USA, there were 30 ex-USAF examples still in Korea that had been retained in the country pre-war for use in the training of RoKAF personnel that were destined to fly the type in frontline service. Of these 30 only about ten survived the training programme, and they were duly given to the RoKAF. Five full days into the war, they were returned to the USAF and flown by nine pilots brought in from the Philippines. Dubbed the 'Dallas Squadron', its aviators all came from the F-80-equipped 18th Fighter-Bomber Group (FBG) at Clark AB. Although now jet pilots, these men also had plenty of Mustang time in their logbooks.

Meanwhile, the top decision makers of Far East Air Forces (FEAF) had issued an emergency call to all ANG units for F-51Ds from all over the country. They were to be flown to Naval Air Station Alameda, in California, to be loaded on the deck of USS *Boxer* (CV-21). With the war only 18 days old, the carrier sailed for Japan with 145 Mustangs on board in addition to its regular air group, its flightdeck and hangar bay jammed with aircraft.

The 'Dallas Squadron' was made up of 12th Fighter-Bomber Squadron (FBS) pilots and personnel. Once they had arrived from Clark AB they

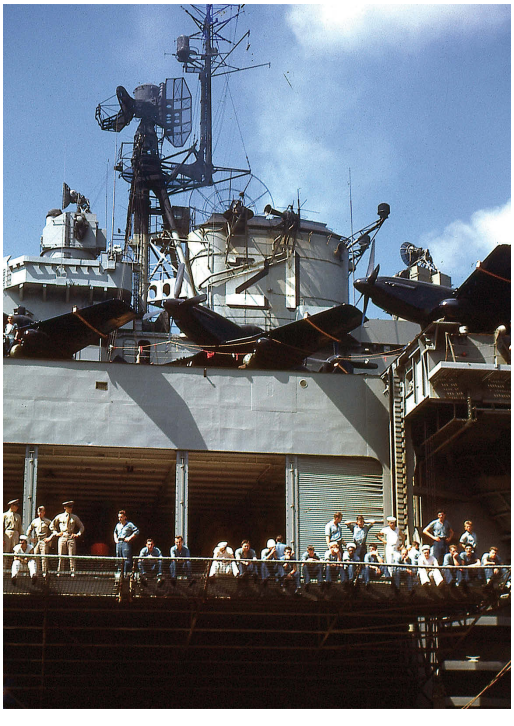
The Mustangs loaded onboard *Boxer* were cocooned in a protective coating to prevent any corrosion from salt spray during the brief transpacific crossing. The fighters shared deck space with six Stinson L-5 Sentinal observation aircraft, 19 naval aeroplanes, 1012 troops (in addition to the ship's regular crew) and 2000 tons of supplies (*Robert Fogg*)

The 'Dallas Squadron' was one of the first USAF units to see action in Korea, its pilots, drawn from the 18th FBG, flying ex-RoKAF Mustangs against the advancing KPA troops. This particular 'Dallas Squadron' fighter (F-51D-25 44-73592) is armed with two 500-lb GP bombs and six 5-in rockets, as well as a full load of 0.50-cal ammunition. Seen here taxiing out at Taegu in July 1950, the aeroplane survived in frontline service until it was shot down whilst strafing communist targets five miles south of Pyongyang on 5 April 1951. The pilot, almost certainly World War 2 Tuskegee airman and DFC recipient Capt George E Gray of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, was listed as Missing in Action. Three Mustangs were downed by ground fire on this date (*Duane Biteman*)

proceeded up to Johnson AB, in Japan, to collect the Mustangs, and from there they went to Ashiya AB, also in Japan, and then to Taegu AB (K-2), in South Korea. Once in-theatre, the 'Dallas' pilots began operating alongside the volunteers of Maj Dean Hess's Project 'Bout One', who were flying the surviving F-51Ds from the original ten given to the RoKAF. Lt Howard 'Scrappy' Johnson was one of Hess's pilots;

'There was only limited success with the South Korean pilots as many of them had flown Japanese aircraft in World War 2, but they had very little knowledge of the Mustang, plus they had been away from dogfighting other fighters for quite some time. Although we were only supposed to be training them in how to fly the Mustang, we were now flying combat missions with the F-51. As soon as the "Dallas" group arrived we changed our name to the 51st Fighter Squadron [FS].

'In July 1950 we had launched 426 combat sorties. I can't recall how many times we were called off of a hot target to fly orbit duty, circling and waiting for a flight of F-80Cs to make a couple of strafing passes before they had to beat it back to Itazuke because they were low on fuel.'



The Essex class aircraft carrier USS *Boxer* (CV-21) prepares to depart from NAS Alameda, California, on 15 July 1950, its flightdeck and hangar deck crammed full of F-51Ds hastily taken from ANG units across the USA. A total of 145 Mustangs were loaded onto the ship, which also embarked 70 experienced pilots to fly them. The vessel made the crossing to Tokyo Bay in just eight days (*Ray Carnahan*)

The 51st FS would fly combat missions near daily as they helped to stop the Korean People's Army (KPA) from ejecting US forces from the Korean Peninsula, operating alongside aircraft from *Valley Forge* and USAF B-26 Invader and F-82G Twin Mustangs. The CO of the 51st FS, Maj Harry H Moreland, recalled one of the first sorties the unit flew from Taegu;

'I was in a two-ship flight and we were going to run the road between Seoul and Taejon and hit anything we could find. Our first target was a couple of North Korean trucks that we strafed and then hit with napalm. There was much activity on the roads, and right after we had headed back to the south I spotted a huge haystack in the middle of a field that had tread marks leading up to it. I made a low-level pass and could see that it was a tank that had been hastily covered with hay. Since we had used up our napalm, we decided to see what our 0.50-cal machine guns could do to it. We couldn't get through to the tank, but our rounds set the hay on fire. We made a few low passes right on top of the haystack in order to fan the flames with our prop wash. The flames literally cooked the tank as we circled and then there was a large explosion. We had destroyed the tank with our machine guns and the help of the intense fire.

'We had flown from Clark Field to Ashiya and then directly on to Taegu. The latter, which was a newly constructed airfield with a PSP [pierced steel planking] runway, was situated in a valley with mountains on either side. Right after we arrived, we received a frag order from Fifth Air Force to attack and destroy about 20 railcars full of ammunition left by the Army when it had made a hasty withdrawal from Taejon. When we got up in the morning to start our day, the weather was bad, with a 700 ft ceiling to the solid overcast.

'We were all new to the area, and I had only one mission under my belt. Because of the bad weather and our unfamiliarly with both the frontline and the Mustang – we had not flown the F-51 much since shifting over to the F-80 – I opted to send out a two-ship flight. We also had no aerial charts, which actually proved beneficial because we used the Army maps that showed the contours of the land in greater detail. I led the third two-ship, with Lt Howard "Scrappy" Johnson as my wingman. Before takeoff I studied the map and found connecting valleys between the mountains that would lead me into the Taejon area. The plan worked and we were able to snake down those valleys to the target area. The other two flights were not as lucky and had to return to base.

'Once in the area we located the railcars and proceeded to strike them with such accuracy that we managed to take out the entire lot. The resulting explosions were awesome, with the sky being lit up like the "4th of July"! Having hit the target we now headed home. Retracing our path back to base, we ran into cloud cover blocking our path down the first valley. Forced to fly back to Taejon, we then climbed through the clouds once over flat terrain and set a course for Taegu AB. It was almost a solid undercast en route, and I was facing having to estimate where the coastline was prior to letting down over the water and then trying to reach home under the low ceiling. Just as I was over Taegu, and about to head for the descent over water, there was a break in the clouds right above the base and we could see the runway. We got in trail, made a tight spiral through the opening in the clouds and landed safely.'

As this mission proved, the 12th FBS had sent some of its most experienced fighter pilots to Korea, including Maj Harry H Moreland. Sporting a handlebar moustache, which soon became a fad amongst F-51 pilots in-theatre, he established 'Moreland's Tank Busters' within weeks of the conflict commencing. Leading a flight of four Mustangs armed with

Flanked by USAF maintenance personnel, 'Dallas Squadron' pilot Lt William McCrystal stands alongside one of the RoKAF's ten surviving F-51Ds at Taegu in late July 1950. He was one of the USAF pilots hastily chosen to fly the Mustang in Korea as part of 'Bout One' – a composite group made up of instructor pilots from the 8th FBG, plus a handful of aviators from the RoKAF. Organised on 27 June, the unit immediately moved 'up-country' to Taegu. 'Bout One's' aircraft had been supplied to the RoKAF from surplus FEAF stocks on the eve of the conflict (*Billy McCrystal*)

F-51D-25 44-73185 was one of the Mustangs used by the 'Dallas Squadron' and then acquired by the 18th FBG's 12th FBS when it took over the 51st FS. It is seen here returning from a mission, many of which at this time were so short that external tanks were not needed. These early war sorties often saw pilots hitting targets barely 15 minutes' flying time from Taegu. 44-73185 was an early casualty, being lost to small-arms fire on 12 September 1950 (*USAF*)

new tank-demolishing 6.5-in rockets, he and his pilots gave UN troops an edge over the Soviet-built T-34 tanks fielded by the KPA. The 51st was the first unit to use the new rocket in Korea, and Moreland's flight was on call 24 hours a day.

Supporting the aviators were dedicated groundcrew such as MSgt John A Simon, who worked in squadron operations during this early war period;

'I was part of the first contingent from Clark Field to go to Korea. The unit was organised by General Orders No 23 at HQ Clark AFB and 18th FBW, dated 5 July 1950. We left Clark on 8 July and went to Ashiya, on Kyushu, where we offloaded our equipment from a C-54 onto a C-47, which flew it to Taegu. Here, we took control of all USAF and RoKAF Mustangs from Project "Bout One". Although we were designated the 51st FS on 10 July, by 1 August we had become the 12th FBS. The squadron eventually left Korea and went to Ashiya, from where it operated for a short while, before returning to Korea when it was sent to Pusan-East [K-9] just prior to the Inchon Landings and breakout [on 15 September 1950]. When we got to Pusan we were joined by the 67th FBS and the HQ flight for the 18th FBG.'

By this time the 12th FBS Mustangs had started to be marked up with their distinctive unit colours, which included the addition of a large sharksmouth on the nose. When South Korean President Syngman Rhee visited the flightline at Pusan in September he christened the squadron the 'Flying Tigers of Korea'.

Among the squadron's pilot cadre at this point was Lt Howard 'Scrappy' Johnson, who would later break the world altitude record in the Lockheed F-104 Starfighter and see combat in Vietnam in the Republic F-105 Thunderchief. Here, he recalled one of his more interesting missions while flying with the early 12th FBS pilots;

'Included in my flight of four were Capt "Spud" Taylor and Lt Daniel "Chappie" James. We each had two cans of napalm and plenty of ammunition and were looking for a fight, as our UN [United Nations] ground forces were being pushed down into the Pusan Perimeter. It didn't look too good! We flew past the Naktong River at 1500 ft and started looking for something to hit. When the KPA started taking a lot of hits during the day, it quickly moved to advancing at night – troops learned to camouflage their tanks, trucks and artillery during the day. If you strafed a haystack and sparks flew from it, you knew that there was something inside other than hay. Sometimes they would drive their tanks into houses to hide them.

'On this particular mission, the first thing that attracted us while flying over a village was when we spotted some dark-painted military vehicles parked around a building. We gave them a burst from our 0.50-cals and then all hell broke loose. We took a lot of them out, destroying their vehicles and the building. It seems that the KPA were using it as some type of headquarters. We still had most of our ordnance on board, so we moved over to a sand dune in the riverbed. Closer scrutiny revealed that there were six pieces of KPA artillery all lined up on it, firing away at our guys on the other side of the Naktong. I led our flight in and we each dropped our cans of napalm on them. Our napalm did not ignite, however, and we could see signs of relief on their faces. This was shortlived!

Bad fuses on our napalm was not unusual, as we had experienced it before. Every third round in our 0.50-cals were incendiaries, so we made another pass on the non-ignited napalm. The rounds set the cans off and the entire area went up in flames, completely enveloping the bad guys and their cannon.'

40th FIS INTO ACTION

The second Mustang unit committed to action in Korea was the 40th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS), which was issued with a handful of ex-RoKAF F-51Ds. This F-80-equipped unit had been rushed into action from Johnson AB within days of the communist invasion, flying its first missions in the well-worn Mustangs on 27 June. Although the unit's pilots had been thoroughly trained in the fighter interception role following their conversion from F-51s to F-80s, they now had to learn the close air support (CAS) mission on the job. By 16 July the 40th was ready to move from Johnson AB to Pohang AB (K-3) on the southeastern coast of South Korea.

Like the 12th FBS, the 40th armed its Mustangs primarily with napalm canisters. It used these, along with the fighter's six hard-hitting 0.50-cal machine guns, against KPA mechanised troops that were using the main highways to pour south. During the early months of the conflict all ordnance was expended on virtually every mission due to the sheer abundance of targets and the paucity of UN combat aircraft in-theatre.

Another unique aspect of the early months of the Korean War was the fact that Mustang pilots had to spend time embedded with troops on the ground directing CAS missions flown by their aerial counterparts. This was due to a shortage of qualified Forward Air Controllers (FACs) with the FEAF. 1Lt Walt Bryan of the 40th FIS performed this hazardous role, being ordered by Maj Gen William F Dean, commander of the

Near spotless F-51Ds of the 35th FG's 40th FIS sit on the ramp at Ashiya AB, Japan, in early July 1950, the squadron having only just swapped its F-80Cs for Mustangs. The nearest aeroplane (F-51D-25 44-74109), *Promiscuous Miss II*, was assigned to Capt Walt Bryan, while the fighter with the yellow spinner (F-51D-25 44-73608) was a 51st FS machine. The latter aircraft was lost on 30 July 1950 whilst being flown by 1Lt Howard E Smith, who was killed (*Walt Bryan*)

Throughout July 1950 the 'Dallas Squadron'/51st FS generated many sorties per aeroplane in an effort to stem the advance of the KPA. In this evocative photograph hardworking groundcrewmen are providing visual guidance for the pilot as he taxies his 'plain Jane' F-51D to Taegu's ordnance reloading area. The unit's operations tents can be seen to the right of the fighter (*Duane Biteman*)

24th Infantry Division and recipient of the Medal of Honor, to stay with his troops and direct air attacks against the KPA;

'I spent several days with the guys and we were fighting a losing battle. I was one of the few that made it out and Gen Dean was captured [at Taejon]. I immediately went over to the 1st Cavalry Division, which would replace the 24th, and it seemed that all we could do was slow down the advancing enemy – I called in numerous strikes. We'd fall back, regroup, delay as long as possible and then repeat. Finally, my radio failed and it could not be repaired, so it was time to return to Taegu.

'Fighting with the troops on the ground gave me a new perspective on the war. I really respected the foot soldier and the hardships he endured.'

During the third week of July the commander of the 12th FBS, Capt William S Slater, and his wingman, Capt Frank C Buzze, were in the Taejon area waiting to be given a target. Suddenly, a frantic call came in from a North American T-6 'Mosquito' pilot asking for an immediate response. Upon arrival over the scene they found a company from the 1st Cavalry Division and a supporting tank platoon completely blanketed by enemy artillery, positioned on a high ridge above them. Slater and Buzze quickly knocked out the KPA batteries with napalm, rockets and, finally, several passes with their 0.50-cals. Several days later an officer from the 1st Cavalry contacted the two pilots, stating that they had not only destroyed the artillery but saved the lives of more than 200 troops.

As the KPA advanced southward, the civilian population of South Korea clogged the roads in an attempt to avoid being subjugated by the communists. They routinely caused problems for the F-51 pilots as they attempted to identify and attack enemy forces that were also using the same roads, as Maj Harry H Moreland of the 12th FBS explained;

'In August 1950 the North Koreans had advanced almost to our base at Taegu. We were to leave in a few days and fall back to Ashiya, but before that we were flying as many sorties as possible in an attempt to stop their advance. KPA troops would hole up during the daylight hours to prevent our attacks on their vehicles. Lt Daniel "Chappie" James and I were on a mission during this period, and we were in contact with a FAC who had spotted a large body of enemy troops coming down a road on foot. He then led us to a large group of people heading south. Before we started our strafing runs we decided to take a closer look, buzzing the crowd. Both

During the early weeks of the conflict Mustang units eventually fell back to Ashiya AB, on Kyushu, due to the worsening situation in Korea. Serviced and armed here, the aircraft would set off from the Japanese airfield and attack a target, before rearming and refuelling at Taegu and then striking a second target. Only then would pilots return to Ashiya. This aeroplane was photographed prior to flying its next mission to Korea during the early summer of 1950. Note the B-17H air-sea rescue aircraft, C-47 transport and SA-16 Albatross search and rescue amphibian parked behind the Mustang (*via Author*)

"Chappie" and I saw mostly women and children, and only a few men. They did not run for cover. We both felt that they were really refugees running from the enemy, and opted not to attack. I am glad we didn't because we would never have lived it down.

'Instead, we went down a little valley and located a number of camouflaged vehicles. The enemy had dug holes in the hillside, run the vehicles into the holes and then covered them with branches. Some of the branches were a little off on colour, and we would also see a few tyre tracks. Once you got the knack of it, it wasn't too hard to find them. Instead of strafing some very questionable folks on the ground, we ended up destroying about 20 vehicles, some of which were fully loaded with ammo, as evidenced by the explosions. Both "Chappie" and I were pleased with the results.'

All of the Mustang squadrons were forced to work at night too, especially with the KPA bearing down on the Pusan Perimeter. Normally, B-26s would have been tasked with attacking the enemy transports after dark, but they were busy working roads far to the north.

Capt William S Slater of the 12th FBS undertook one such mission from a base in Japan during this period of intense activity, taking off at 2330 hrs on a moonless night. He was forced to fly on instruments, as cloud covered most of his route. Upon reaching the Naktong River, he slowly descended through scattered clouds, using ground fires as a reference. Slater was astonished to see the lights of endless rows of trucks that were jamming the roads. His ordnance load was rockets and two 500-lb bombs, the latter being expended on his initial pass. Next came two rocket passes, which prompted Slater to comment 'You haven't lived until you've been blinded by your rockets own firing in front of you on a moonless night mission'. After he had finished off his 5-in rockets, he fired all of his 0.50-cal ammunition, which took several more passes. Having just about wiped out the truck column, Slater flew all the way back to his base in Japan on instruments. He was later rewarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for the mission.

Project 'Bout One' pilot Lt Howard 'Scrappy' Johnson was one of Maj Dean Hess's volunteer F-51 instructors in South Korea when the war started. He and his fellow instructors joined forces with the 'Dallas Squadron' when it was posted in from the Philippines, thus creating the short-lived 51st FS. The latter unit eventually became the 12th FBS, assigned to the 18th FBG. Johnson, by now promoted to captain, is seen with his Mustang at Taegu during the summer of 1950 (*Harry H Moreland*)

Capt Daniel 'Chappie' James poses by his 12th FBS Mustang at Taegu in early August 1950. One of the pilots brought over to fly Mustangs with the 'Dallas Squadron', he subsequently saw more combat flying F-4 Phantom IIs with the 8th TFW in the Vietnam War and eventually attained the rank of general officer (four stars) in the USAF prior to retiring (*Ed Nebinger*)

'The Mustangs were flying so many missions, and flying them so fast, that the maintenance and armaments crews were having a problem turning the aeroplanes around', Slater recalled. 'One afternoon, when my section was on duty, I devised a plan whereby my pilots would remain in their aeroplanes, taxi from the refuelling point to where they were to be rearmed, then move down the line as various types of armaments were attached to their F-51s. The guys in the squadron started referring to the procedure as production-line armament, and it worked so well that other flights from Itazuke and Ashiya began landing at Taegu to refuel, rearm and fly another mission before returning to their bases.

'The 51st FS had done its job well in the early weeks of the conflict, and as more and more Mustangs began to crop up in other squadrons [thanks to the *Boxer*], they started leaving a trail of destruction behind enemy lines.'

Capt Duane 'Bud' Biteman was another of the pilots posted in from the Philippines shortly after the war commenced;

'We started out in the ex-RoKAF F-51s. On an early combat mission I was scheduled to fly with one of our most experienced pilots, Lt Howard "Scrappy" Johnson. Our Mustangs were spread thin, and that is why we

flew in two-ship sorties instead of the standard four-ship flights. We took off in a swirl of dust, gaining altitude and using the railroad tracks as our main navigational aids. We proceeded into the Taejon area, where we made contact with a "Mosquito" pilot who was returning to base for refuelling. He told us that everything on the roads north of Taejon was the enemy. Looking below, we witnessed dozens of tank battles and heavy smoke from numerous burning buildings. Three miles from the city we found our target – three different tanks on the main road. From about 8000 ft Lt Johnson peeled off in an almost vertical dive. Seconds later I followed him. Our bombs hit about 20-30 ft from the tanks, but they survived unscathed.

'We then lined up to fire our rockets at them, which we salvoed from 300 yards. All three tanks were struck in the treads [tracks], thus immobilising them. Moments later their hatches popped open and the crews began firing their machine guns at us.

'Since we still had our 0.50-cal [ammunition] left, we moved on down the road in search of other targets. Just south of Suwon [K-13] we came across two trucks loaded with North Korean troops. Lt Johnson made the first pass, hitting the lead truck in its engine. Although the troops then scattered for the surrounding ditches, we simply lined up on either side of the road and made our firing passes, which led to the death of most of them. After the second truck blew up we figured we had done enough damage, so headed back to base.'

The Mustang could employ a wide variety of ordnance, but the most effective in Korea proved to be napalm canisters and 0.50-cal ammunition. The rockets used by the squadrons during the early months of the conflict came from stocks left over from World War 2. Although they proved to be great tank-stoppers, the rockets were very erratic. However, when they hit tank treads they proved their worth.

In records kept by the 51st FIS, it was noted that the squadron also experimented with light-case 500-lb GP bombs filled with thermite and napalm. These weapons were extremely effective against enemy tanks and troops, for the significant amount of rubber in the tank treads would ignite, thus disabling it. In statements made by hundreds of North Korean prisoners, the weapon most feared by them was the jellied mixture of napalm and palm oil that ignited as it hit the ground.

Although CAS dominated the F-51 mission tasking during the summer and autumn of 1950, Mustang pilots occasionally encountered Soviet-built aircraft (primarily Yakovlev Yak-9s and Ilyushin Il-10s) of the Korean People's Air Force (KPAF). Many of the encounters resulted in vicious dogfights, with USAAF pilots reporting that their opponents were often very good. It was theorised that the North Koreans had probably flown for the Japanese towards the end of World War 2. Nevertheless, F-51 pilots had been credited with at least 12 NKPAF aeroplanes shot down by the end of 1950.

The early Mustangs had their share of problems due to a combination of their age and the high mission tempo observed by FEAF units in-theatre. Just about every pilot had at least one close call in an F-51 during 1950 as a result. Capt Duane Biteman's came during a mission that started in the twilight of late afternoon but ended in total darkness;

'Jerry Mau and I had started out as a two-ship flight, hitting ground targets southeast of Taejon. Smoke and haze from burning buildings made

F-51s were always at risk of being brought down by ground fire due to their close proximity to their targets. No fewer than eight were lost to enemy action in July 1950, including this example. Luckier than most, the pilot of the fighter managed to coax the shot up Mustang back to Taegu, where he performed a belly landing that saw him emerge from the battered aircraft with little more than minor cuts and scrapes. The fighter was stripped of all useable parts and then salvaged (*Tom Shockley*)

visibility extremely poor, and by the time we'd run out of ammunition and were ready to head back, the sun had already gone down and it was very dark. Chuck Hauver and Phil Conserva had been working the same area a few miles northeast of Taejon, and they flew close behind us as we tried to follow the road and railroads through the haze back to Taegu. Jerry had only a magnetic compass in his aircraft – it had no functioning gyro instruments whatsoever – so he signalled me to fly the lead position while he remained in close formation on my wing. I got on the radio and told him that I only had a gyro compass, with no operable artificial horizon or magnetic compass that would enable me to cross-check and reset my gyro compass. All this meant that we would have a tough time flying instruments and navigating in the dark.

'Chuck and Phil were experiencing similar problems, and overheard our conversations about our predicament. Phil had an artificial horizon, but his pitot-static system was fouled up and he had no functioning altimeter and his airspeed indicator was unreliable. Chuck had the altimeter and an airspeed indicator, but nothing else.

'When we heard what the other two had, I suggested that we get together before it became too dark, as between the four of us we had a complete set of navigation and flight instruments! I made a couple of wide circles with my navigation lights on, and they were soon able to swing inside the turn and join up with us. Since Phil Conserva had the only operable attitude gyro, we put him in the lead, and with my gyro compass I took his left wing. Chuck Hauver flew on his right wing and Jerry Mau, with no operable navigation instruments whatsoever, tucked in close on Chuck's right wing. Phil kept the formation straight and level, and I gave him directional information such as "Five degrees left". Chuck gave us verification checks on airspeed and altitude. We eventually landed at Taegu with no problems.

'The condition of our Mustangs gradually improved as time went on, and our groundcrews spent some long nights getting all the F-51s into a safe and operable condition.'

CHAPTER TWO

ANG MUSTANGS EQUIP SIX SQUADRONS

It took *Boxer* just eight days to steam west from Alameda to Tokyo Bay, the vessel departing California on 15 July 1950. The *Essex* class carrier was crammed full of F-51s – 145 in total – most of which bore ANG markings beneath the black protective coating that they had been cocooned in so as to prevent corrosion from the salt-laden environment of a carrier flightdeck. Once in the Far East there was no time to waste, as these aircraft had to be sent into battle as soon as possible in order to prevent UN forces from being kicked out of South Korea altogether. The top brass in the Fifth Air Force had stated that the FEAF would have only two weeks to get the fighters ready.

UN air forces were now also beginning to make a contribution towards the fight in Korea, with No 77 Sqn of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) being one of the first non-American units to arrive in-theatre. It would be attached to the 35th FBG – two of the group's three squadrons (the 39th and 40th FISs) were re-equipped with F-51s, while the third unit kept its F-80Cs and stayed in Japan at Ashiya. The RAAF unit would remain with the group until 30 July 1951, when it re-equipped with Gloster Meteor F 8s and moved up to Kimpo to be attached to the F-86 Sabre-equipped 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing (FIW).

1Lt Robert Titus of the 40th FIS was photographed en route to Korea from Johnson AB in F-51D *Little Ditty* during the autumn of 1950. After completing his tour on Mustangs (having switched to the 39th FIS towards the end of his tour), Titus converted onto the F-86 and flew as a wingman to some of the USAF's best fighter pilots. More than a decade later he led the 10th Air Commando Squadron in Vietnam, flying Northrop F-5A Freedom Fighters (*Robert Titus*)

At dawn on 7 August 1950 all of the 39th FIS's F-51s took off from Ashiya for the last time. Fully loaded with bombs, napalm, rockets and ammunition, they flew CAS missions en route to their new base at Pohang. A total of 26 combat sorties were flown that first day, and just 72 hours after arriving in Korea the 39th suffered its first casualty. During the morning of 10 August 1Lt James Mathis completed his attack on a target but was then struck then by ground fire and failed to return. He was listed as killed in action.

The conditions at K-3 were very different from those in Japan, as a crew chief from the 39th FIS recalled;

'Pohang was a blinding dust bowl, with stifling heat and high humidity. Everyone who was there at that time will agree with this. We performed our duties under the boiling sun and dry conditions at the time. We lived on a diet of "C" rations and had to drink putrid hot water out of blister bags and water tanks pulled around by 6 x 6 trucks – it was "flavoured" by purification tablets provided to the groundcrews. It was truly a hellhole to work in, and the enemy was putting a lot of pressure on us as the Pusan Perimeter began to tighten.

'The brief stay of the 39th at Pusan airstrip was perilous for the entire squadron. With the KPA rapidly advancing south, our aircraft were taking off before daylight so that they could be in the target area assigned to them at first light. They had to put in long hours in order to slow down the communists. It proved to be a tireless routine for all concerned, the aeroplanes being lined up for refuelling and more ordnance, prior to taking off again. Many of the pilots went through this routine several times a day.

'Two days after we lost Mathis, another of our pilots was killed answering a call from the 24th Infantry Division, which was pinned down by a large concentration of KPA troops. After his four-ship had finished laying down its ordnance, they continued to make strafing runs. It was on this run that he was hit by ground fire. The pilot pulled up to gain altitude, his engine burning, then jettisoned his canopy and bailed out. The slipstream pulled him back into the aircraft, causing him to strike the tailplane. His 'chute never opened, fate having dealt another one of our pilots a bad hand.'

The 40th FIS took just 72 hours to settle into Pohang, despite conditions in Korea being in sharp contrast to those it had enjoyed at its previous location, Johnson AB. Squadron pilots and groundcrews quickly settled into a routine of conducting CAS sorties from dawn to dusk. On a rainy, overcast, morning during the final week of August, the 40th was called on to lend a helping hand to some heavily outnumbered Republic of Korea Army troops fighting on the east coast. For a week, working with a ceiling

Mustangs of the 39th FIS (left) and 40th FISs are rearmed at Taegu after flying a mission from Pohang in the autumn of 1950. The groundcrews are loading 500-lb GP bombs, having already attached 5-in rockets to both fighters. Ammunition boxes can also be seen on the weapons trolley (*James Farr*)

as low as 165 ft, the 40th FIS averaged about 35 sorties per day. It ended up decimating a force of 1500 KPA troops and most of their equipment. Captured enemy soldiers stated that it was the Mustangs, dropping napalm canisters and making myriad strafing runs, that halted their momentum and destroyed their will to fight.

1Lt Robert Fogg was one of the 70 experienced Mustang pilots who accompanied the 145 F-51s across the Pacific onboard *Boxer*. Once in-theatre these aircraft equipped six full squadrons. Fogg flew his missions with the 36th FBS (*Robert Fogg*)

One of the armourers serving with the unit at this time kept a log of the ordnance expended during a 48-hour period, and this clearly shows the intensity of the CAS being given in the early months of the war. On 25 August the first mission was flown at dawn, with 15 Mustangs taking off from Tsuiki AB, in Japan, carrying the following ordnance loads – eight armed with 16 fragmentation bombs, 48 rockets and 15,040 rounds of 0.50-cal ammunition, and seven F-51s with 14 110-US gal napalm tanks, 42 rockets and 13,160 rounds. This weaponry was used for CAS and ground support against enemy troops. When the F-51s returned to base, it transpired that there had been 14 rocket misfirings and nine gun malfunctions. Bad weather then closed in, preventing further sorties for that day.

On 26 August more than 40 sorties were flown, with 25 aircraft being armed with 500-lb GP bombs, 150 rockets and 47,000 rounds of ammunition. Another ten carried 250-lb fragmentation bombs, 60 rockets and 18,800 rounds of 0.50-cal ammunition, while the remaining Mustangs were armed with 16 110-US gal napalm tanks, 48 rockets and 15,040 rounds of armour-piercing incendiary (API) ammunition. The final reckoning for the day was that all of the bombs and napalm were dropped, 248 rockets were fired (ten misfires) and 27,700 rounds of ammunition were expended. This record kept by the armourer bears great testimony to all the 39th FIS personnel, pilots, crew chiefs and armourers working as a finely tuned team.

The 8th FBG from Itazuke AB was also committed to the Korea conflict once the F-51s arrived in Japan onboard *Boxer*. There were only sufficient Mustangs to re-equip two of its three squadrons, however, the 35th and 36th FBSs having swapped their F-80Cs for F-51s, while the 80th FIS retained its Shooting Stars. By 11 August both Mustang squadrons were at full combat status, and they initially operated mostly from Itazuke due to the lack of a suitable base in Korea at that time. However, many pilots would land and rearm near the frontline immediately after completing their first CAS mission, allowing them to perform a second sortie in support of beleaguered UN troops before finally flying back to Itazuke.

This F-51D-25, assigned to the 35th FBS, is equipped with 11.75-in 'Tiny Tim' rockets that were 'found' at Kimpo by the unit – they were almost certainly the property of a US Marine Corps unit. 'Requisitioned' by squadron CO Lt Col William Samways, they were attached to the underwing bomb/drop tank pylons and used on a mission against bridges spanning the Yalu River in the autumn of 1950. Deemed unfit for further combat after suffering serious battle damage, this aircraft had its fuselage fuel tank and armour plating removed whilst being repaired and a rear-facing seat installed in their place (*Robert Dewald*)

With the fielding of the 8th FBG, the Fifth Air Force had completed the conversion of six squadrons to F-51s in a massive, well-executed team effort – and the Korean War was only 46 days

old. The airfields at Taegu and Pohang were now full, which meant that the 35th FBS had to send aircraft to the third UN airfield at Suwon. This battered, dust-filled, airstrip was equipped with a pierced steel planking (PSP) runway. The 35th FBS moved to Suwon on 7 October, although its sister-squadron (the 36th FBS) remained in Japan.

Keeping up with the demand for F-51s over enemy territory put a huge burden on the mechanics, the swirling dust choking the fighter's filters and finding its way into every corner of the aircraft's engine and equipment. In some Mustang units the amount of work for the line crews was tripled. Preventative maintenance was employed to the utmost to keep all of the F-51s flying. Dust was blamed for causing many engine failures on takeoff, clogging carburettor screens, getting into the fuel systems and fouling sparkplugs. Many squadrons reduced the damage by draining all aircraft fuel tanks, testing the fuel and straining it before re-use. The engine systems were flushed twice with clean fuel and the screens were checked after every flight. Controls in the cockpit were also wired in the 'filtered air' position. The engineering officer for one of the Korea-based Mustang units stated that he had served in the Libyan desert in North Africa in World War 2 and had never seen dust quite like that in Korea.

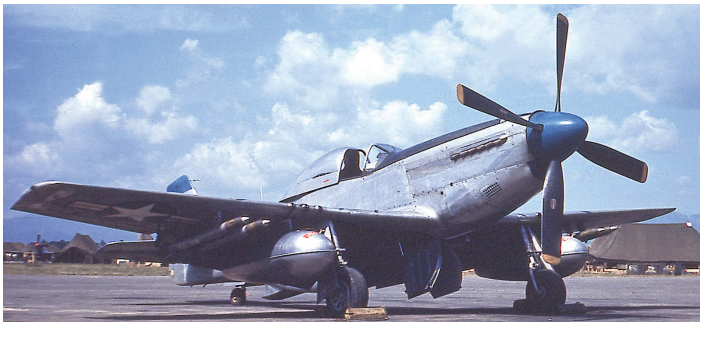
Meanwhile, the 18th FBG – the original Mustang operator in Korea – now had enough F-51s to send its 67th FBS into action alongside the 12th FBS. By 30 July the FEAF had 890 combat aircraft in-theatre, comprising 264 Mustangs and 626 F-80s. However, only 525 were with frontline units and available for combat.

After the Battle of Taejon had ended in defeat for UN forces on 21 July, US troops fell back to defensive positions that they had established along the Pusan Perimeter. It was the job of the F-51 pilots to help the UN force on the ground retain this toehold in the southeast corner of Korea. The risks facing F-51 pilots during the Battle of the Pusan Perimeter, which commenced on 4 August and continued through to 18 September, were particularly high due to the intensity of the ground fire put up by the KPA.

Just 24 hours after the battle had commenced, the CO of the 67th FS, Maj Louis J Sebille, led a routine CAS mission against enemy artillery and troops hidden along the banks of a river near Hamchang. On his first firing pass one of his 500-lb bombs failed to release from its shackle. While he was making a second, failed, attempt to release the weapon, his aircraft took several hits from intense ground fire as he pulled out. This left Sebille with two choices – he could fly back to the nearest airstrip and land or he could make another pass. He chose the latter option. Sebille's wingman stated that his CO took many more hits on the third pass and never pulled out. His aircraft flew directly into a cluster of enemy vehicles and exploded. As a result of this selfless mission Maj Sebille was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, becoming the first of only four USAF personnel to receive America's highest military decoration in Korea.

1Lt Peter W Richardson of the 36th FBS was also heavily involved

The 8th FBG entered the war with F-80Cs, but its 35th and 36th FBSs reverted to F-51Ds for a short period after *Boxer's* aircraft reach Japan. This Mustang of the 35th FBS has been loaded with napalm and rockets at Tsuiki AB, Japan, ready for its next mission over South Korea (*via Author*)



F-51D-30 44-74753 of the 18th FBG is serviced in the open at Pusan East – note all six 0.50-cal machine guns lying on the ground beneath the tail of the fighter. This aeroplane suffered a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire that caused it to burst into flames and crash near Kangdong on 2 February 1951. Its pilot, Capt Elzead J Deschamps of the 67th FBS, was listed as Missing in Action (*Robert Cusick*)

in the action over Pusan, flying many armed reconnaissance missions in August-September 1950;

'On one particularly memorable sortie I was flying in the No 2 slot in a four-ship formation of F-51s. My leader attacked a truck at an intersection of two major roads. As he pulled out from a strafing run and was over the truck, a steel cable was thrown up and entangled his aeroplane, wrapping itself under his engine nacelle and over both wings, then looping around his aft fuselage and trailing out about 100 ft, forming a 40-60-degree cone. With his voice showing the strain he was under, the pilot asked me whether I would get behind him and cut the cable with my propeller. I told him it was not feasible, as with both of us entangled we would go down. He would just have to hang in there. I could see that he was able to climb and control his altitude, although this was not easy for him to do. With great forces acting on him through the controls, the leader flew all the way back to Pyongyang with his engine power at high rpm, while slowly descending. He crossed the Taedong River, bordering our base, with the cable slapping the water, and bellied his F-51 onto the airfield at about 150 mph.

'The group C-47 was just starting its takeoff run as the Mustang bounced and ploughed across the field in front of it and on into the rice paddies beyond. It finally struck a dyke and came to a sudden stop. The C-47 pilot aborted his takeoff on seeing what was going on, taxied rapidly to where the aircraft had left the runway and immediately discharged personnel, who ran to the Mustang and got the pilot out. The pilot was okay, but I heard he had suffered leg injuries from the belly landing and sudden stop. He was shipped back home as a result.'

36th FBS pilot 1Lt Harold Webster poses by his elaborately painted F-51K-10 44-12234. He was killed in action on 14 September 1950 when the aircraft he was flying (F-51D-20 44-72195) hit a cable in the mountains south of Kuksa-Bong, near Taejon. A number of Mustangs hit wires strewn across the deep valleys by the enemy, and some pilots managed to nurse their crippled machines back to the closest friendly airfield (*Joe Rogers*)

The determination of early F-51 pilots to help troops on the ground meant that they routinely made several passes over heavily defended targets despite the obvious dangers. One such individual who threw caution to the wind was 1Lt Ted Baader of the 12th FBS, who received a DFC for a mission he flew on 1 September 1950. Part of a flight searching for mechanised artillery near Pocheon, in South Korea, he located an enemy self-propelled weapon dug in along a ditch. On his first pass Baader dropped both of his napalm tanks, completely demolishing the target.

Looking less than pristine, this 12th FBS F-51D has just returned to Yokota AB, Japan, following a mission in defence of the Pusan Perimeter in September 1950. One of Mustangs brought in onboard *Boxer*, the fighter is awaiting rearmament before heading back to Korea again. Parked next to the F-51 is a B-26B from the 3rd BW, this unit also being heavily involved in the Pusan operation (*Duane Biteman*)

A few minutes later his flight was asked to proceed west of that area to assist UN troops pinned down by enemy small-arms and mortar fire. In spite of heavy smoke and haze, Baader made several low strafing runs, which were opposed by heavy small-arms fire. On his third pass his Mustang was hit by 20 mm fire that damaged his left flap and aileron to the extent that coordinated flying was difficult. This did not stop him, and he began a fourth pass and received some 0.50-cal fire that damaged the rudder and control cables of his aeroplane so badly that it became difficult to maintain directional control. Again none of this stopped Baader, who, only after making two more passes, finally pulled away and headed for friendly territory. Not only was he credited with destroying the self-propelled gun, he was also credited with killing or wounding 100 enemy troops. A few days after Baader received the DFC he completed 100 missions and finished his tour with the 12th FBS.

INVASION

With the Pusan Perimeter getting smaller, Gen Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, had hatched a daring plan – codenamed Operation *Chromite* – to break the KPA hold on South Korea and eventually rout the communist forces. He planned to land the US Marine Corps at Inchon and attack the North Koreans from both directions. After a top-secret high-level meeting at MacArthur's HQ in Tokyo, he overcame several objections to the plan and won the support of his superiors. MacArthur ended the conference with the following statement;

'The only alternative to a strike such as I propose will be the continuation of the savage sacrifice we are making at Pusan, with no hope of relief in sight.

The 12th FBS flew a lot of missions in the early war period, some of the most demanding being undertaken at the beginning of September 1950. The KPA was pressing closer, and on many of these sorties the Mustangs were based only minutes from the frontlines. This meant that all of the squadron's serviceable aircraft could undertake several missions a day (*John Lent*)

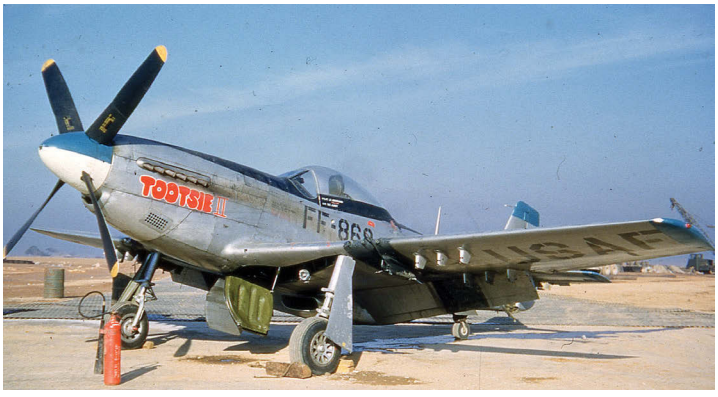
Still looking quite fresh when photographed at Pohang in September 1950, F-51D-30 44-74383 *Bugs Bunny* of the 40th FIS is fully armed with napalm canisters and 5-in rockets. Having been taken from the 170th FS of the Illinois ANG, this aircraft was shipped to Japan onboard *Boxer* and issued to the 40th FIS – the red-and-white spinner was the only unit marking employed by the squadron at this time. The 40th was the first regular Fifth Air Force squadron to be re-equipped with the Mustang and sent into combat over Korea. 44-74383's principal pilot was Capt Oakley Allen, although it was also flown by several other aviators. Eventually passed on to the RoKAF, the aeroplane was returned to the USAF in February 1952 and then supplied to the Philippine Air Force (*Oakley Allen*)

Are you content to let our troops stay in that bloody perimeter like beef cattle in a slaughterhouse? Who will take the responsibility for such a tragedy? Certainly, I will not!'

The planning of Operation *Chromite* went ahead. The biggest issue for the amphibious assault was figuring out the right time to attack because of the unusually swift tides in the area. The 1st Marine Division came ashore at Inchon on 15 September and rapidly liberated Seoul and then pressed on into the middle of South Korea, sending the KPA into a headlong retreat. F-51s and F4Us committed to the invasion prevented the enemy from sending in reinforcements during the early days of the landing. Ultimately, although the Inchon landing was in itself a success as it relieved pressure on the Pusan Peninsula, the KPA rallied after it was bolstered by an influx of troops from the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA). The war then turned into a bloody stalemate until the cessation of hostilities in July 1953.

The 35th FBG was busy supporting both the defence of Pusan and the invasion at Inchon during the summer and autumn of 1950, its 39th and 40th FISs flying from Pusan AB. The units' consumption of ordnance was tremendous during this period, with missions being flown all day from first light until shortly after dusk. Indeed, the last sorties of the day routinely returned to base after dark. Pilots gained so much combat experience that they perfected their delivery technique to the point where they could deposit their ordnance within 50 yards of friendly troops. This gave them a 90-100 per cent success grade from onlooking airborne FACs piloting T-6 'Mosquito' aircraft over the frontline. When interrogated, captured enemy troops attempting to penetrate the Pusan Perimeter stated that they did not mind facing the troops' artillery and bullets, However, when napalm was accurately put down by the Mustangs the same battle-hardened soldiers would break ranks and run.

As previously noted, napalm quickly proved to be the most effective air-to-ground weapon available to the UN in Korea. In his book *Enter the Dragon*, author Russell Spurr described how he went into Macau a few years after the war to interview several veterans who had fought for the Chinese. All the soldiers he spoke to stated that the weapon they feared the most was napalm.



TOOTSIE II was assigned to the 39th FIS in the autumn of 1950, and it flew several missions to support the 1st Cavalry Division when it was fighting to break out of the Pusan Perimeter in mid-September following the Inchon Landing. Pilots of the aircraft dropped napalm within 50 yards of friendly troops, helping them to rout the KPA (*Carl Plesia*)

1Lt Robert Dunnavant of the 39th FIS survived a tour of duty in Korea, having been one of the first pilots to see action flying from Johnson AB. His account of a mission he flew on 12 September shows what many of the pilots went through in the early months of the war;

'Most of the ground fire we encountered came from small-calibre or 20 mm weapons, although I recall on one mission seeing what appeared to be much larger 40 mm rounds. I took five or six hits from small arms during my tour, but nothing too serious happened until my mission on 12 September. That day, my Mustang was carrying two 500-lb GP bombs, six rockets and a full load of 0.50-cal ammo.

'Our flight orbited at 8000 ft in an area 20 miles south of Taegu, waiting to be called by the airborne FAC operating over the frontline battles in a T-6 "Mosquito" aircraft. We soon got the call, being vectored to where an enemy troop concentration was supposed to be. The terrain was very rugged and hilly, being well covered by vegetation. We attacked the location we were given with pinpoint accuracy, dropping our bombs on the first pass and then coming around to fire our rockets – two of the rockets on my aeroplane failed to fire, however. I did not detect any ground fire until my third pass, when oil suddenly covered the windscreen of my fighter whilst I was flying at an altitude of just 200 ft. I immediately started to climb, and at the same time turned the nose of my fighter in a southeasterly direction. The oil temperature was rapidly rising and, thinking the engine might catch fire, I decided to bail out. A belly landing had been ruled out by the two failed rockets still attached to the rails under my wings.

'At about 1000 ft, with no forward visibility, I released my canopy. Oil immediately covered my face, causing my eyelids to stick together. I stood up, preparatory to going over the side, but I hit the trigger on the control column and the guns started spraying bullets everywhere – that scared the hell out of me to the point where I sat back down in the cockpit. I had not turned the gun switch off. I then made my second mistake. The Sutton harness of my parachute had a centre buckle lock and I had not put in the safety pin that prevented the straps from being accidentally released. When I started to stand up again I bumped the release and all the straps dropped loose. This meant I was no longer attached to the 'chute. Luckily for me I was still flying along at 140 mph at 1000 ft.

'I buckled up the harness again, installed the pin, retrimmed for hands-off flight and scrambled headlong over the side. The horizontal stabiliser hit my right leg below the knee and flipped me. The pain in my leg was not that great at the time, and 30 seconds after my 'chute opened I hit the ground. I landed in the middle of a dirt road and rolled off into a rice paddy. My leg was broken, and now I could feel it, but fortunately a jeep carrying a litter soon pulled up and got me to an aid station, from where I was finally flown back to Japan.'

CHAPTER THREE

OPERATING FAR NORTH OF THE 38th PARALLEL

Attrition amongst the F-51 units steadily rose into the autumn of 1950 as units ranged north of Pyongyang harrying the retreating KPA. According to Lt Ralph 'Smiley' Hall, a pilot in the 35th FBS, by the middle of October 1950 his group (the 8th FBG) had lost 26 pilots since the start of the conflict, including commanders from the 35th and 36th FBSs and the 80th FIS (the latter squadron was, of course, flying F-80Cs out of Itazuke AB). The 8th's two F-51 units were hit the hardest. Amongst those killed serving with the 35th FBS were Lt John Munkres (on 15 August), who crashed into the sea shortly after takeoff, Lt Arlie Mullet (on 24 August), who perished while attempting to land at Taegu after his Mustang had been riddled by heavy ground fire, and, shortly thereafter, Lt Pat Gilliam, who went straight into the sea after his fighter was hit by AAA.

Despite the heavy losses, the FEAF remained committed to supporting the advancing UN troops as they pushed beyond the 38th Parallel into communist North Korea. F-51 pilots like Capt Marvin Wallace, serving with the 39th FIS, continued to 'run the roads' searching for enemy truck convoys;

Mustangs from the 18th FBG were refuelled and rearmed at various bases in South Korea once the Chinese had pushed UN forces back south of the 38th Parallel, these 67th FBS fighters being photographed at Seoul City AB in the spring of 1951 as they queued for fuel and 0.50-cal rounds. Each of the Mustangs was also loaded with napalm and 5-in rockets (*Max Tomich*)

'The flying became fairly routine except for the weather. The enemy was retreating north through the Seoul area and north of Wonsan, on the southeast coast. The weather was always a factor, but during my period there I only knew of one pilot killed and a second Mustang lost due to bad weather conditions. Occasionally, we flew unusual missions, such as providing top cover for reconnaissance RB-29s that went all the way up to the Yalu River. These missions lasted about four hours, so we had to fit external fuel tanks to our fighters. This was before the MiG-15 became a factor in northern Korea, and prior to F-86s being transferred in to the FEAF to deal with them. We knew that there were plenty of MiGs at airfields north of the river, but fortunately we never had to face them.

'Perhaps the most memorable mission during my tour saw me working with an airborne FAC who was flying over a friendly tank column moving west when it came under attack by a single anti-tank gun. As I zoomed right above the column the lead tank was less than 100 yards from the enemy weapon, hidden in a cut in the road. I had only seconds to act, because the enemy troops were just moments away from having a point-blank shot at the tank. I went in right over the lead tank and dropped my napalm directly on the enemy weapon. It probably saved at least the front two or three tanks, but that wasn't the end of the story.

'The mountains were full of retreating North Koreans, and they were trying to get across the river near the closest village. I started strafing them, and 15 minutes later another F-51 flight arrived on the scene. It was led by Col James Gray, and he asked me if I could direct him to a target for his napalm. There were no trucks anywhere in the area, as the rout had caused the communist soldiers to get out on foot because of the daytime strikes against vehicular traffic. I directed the colonel in on a ridge where 300-400 troops were cut off by the two UN tank columns.

'Napalm was a tough way for a soldier to have to die, but we were at war! The strange thing about napalm was that a lot of dead KPA troops were found with no burns. This was probably because the jellified petroleum burns so viciously that it robs all the oxygen from the air. There was also the smothering effect caused by smoke and fumes following the detonation of the canisters.

'We continued to hit the troops as they tried to move across the river – it was shallow enough for them to cross without a boat. Later we heard

Mustangs of the 36th FBS sit crowded together at Kimpo in the autumn of 1950, the FEAF being able to leave their aeroplanes parked in the open like this because the NKPAF had been all but wiped from the skies over Korea. F-51D-24 44-72800 *Blow My Stack* was one of a number of 36th FBS aircraft that featured nicknames in red on their noses. Its final fate remains unrecorded (*Ed Johnson*)

that eight more Mustangs had targeted the same spot after we had left, and something like 1200 troops were counted as dead. The flight that I was on didn't pick up a single bullet hole from all the small-arms fire.'

So many strike missions were carried out by F-51s at this time that many sorties were simply not remembered by those who participated in them as they all seemed to blend into one due to their frequency. The following operation was mounted by the 36th FBS and a US Army helicopter unit on 23 November 1950 after the squadron had an aircraft shot down. One of the pilots involved in the rescue mission, Lt Robert S Fogg, recalled the events as they unfolded;

Doing its best to live up to its nickname, F-51D-30 45-11705 of the 35th FBS was assigned to unit CO Lt Col Charles D Chitty. The fighter was photographed in December 1950 at Seoul City AB whilst undergoing repairs after it had suffered flak damage forward of the cockpit and to the tailplane. Transferred to the 67th FBS/18th FBG in early 1951, 45-11705 received a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire on 5 June that same year while on a combat mission and crashed inverted into a rice paddy near Chinnampo, in North Korea. The remains of the pilot, Capt Ronald R Cree, were not recovered (*Charles Chitty*)

'The 35th and 36th FBSs had recently evacuated their operational strip in Pyongyang when it was close to being overrun by North Korean troops that had rallied following the entry of the Chinese into the conflict. Lack of space at other bases necessitated that the two squadrons operate out of a sand-and-gravel airstrip on an island in the Han River near Seoul City AB [K-16].

'Eight Mustangs were scheduled to bomb the runway at the North Korean airfield at Kangye, each fighter being armed with two 500-lb GP bombs, two 150-US gallon drop tanks and the basic 1800+ rounds of 0.50-cal ammunition. The pre-briefing called for a high-altitude release due to known AAA threats in the area. Nos 7 and 8 in "Blue" flight were Lt Harold Kinison as element lead and myself as his wingman.

'Standard echelon peel-off for a 60-degree dive angle attack at intervals put me in last position to strike the target. I was able to witness the first seven aircraft score hits directly on the runway. Kinison made his run and called out that he had been hit – his aircraft was smoking and the propeller windmilling. He bailed out and we followed his 'chute down into some woods nearby. We flew over him until fuel supplies made us leave for K-16. In the meantime, a relay CAP of other fighters covered him for the rest of the day.

'The following morning Lt Col Bill O'Donnell contacted USAF HQ to see about getting a helicopter in. Their reply was "No". He then approached an Army unit at a nearby airstrip close to the frontlines. Although there was some initial reluctance, they soon gave in. Range limitations meant that Jerry cans of fuel would have to be carried so that the helicopter could top off its tanks en route. I volunteered to ride in the chopper and help refuel and guide the pilot to the bail-out point. Our faster escorts got there first and had trouble finding the point where Kinison might have landed.

36th FBS CO Lt Col Bill O'Donnell returns to Seoul City AB in his F-51 after flying a mission over the north in late 1950. The fighter appears to have a dud 0.5-in rocket still attached to one of its underwing pylons. A veteran of World War 2, O'Donnell and a number of his contemporaries led the 8th FBG with both skill and aggression (*William O'Donnell*)

Capt Joe Rogers of the 36th FBS adjusts the 'whistle' mounted under the wing of his Mustang. Consisting of old 0.50-cal gun barrels, this device made a loud shrieking noise when the F-51 was put into a dive, driving communist troops out of their foxholes – it also proved especially effective in getting the enemy to vacate railway tunnels. When Rogers pulled up after a non-firing pass, his wingman was able to 'mop up' the fleeing troops. This apparatus earned Capt Rogers the nickname 'Whistlin' Joe' (*William O'Donnell*)

They then flew north of the spot, and suddenly a flare shot up – we had him located. As the chopper was called in, the pilot said he was taking small-arms fire and told me we would have to leave. At that point we saw Kinison run out of the woods, and the chopper descended enough for him to grab the right wheel. A crewman soon hauled him in. This rescue – one of the furthest flown into enemy territory – had taken place on Thanksgiving Day.

'The following day Kinison told us of his eluding enemy troops by hiding under a bridge. During a subsequent intelligence debriefing at Fifth Air Force HQ, Kinison informed his superior officers that we had been fighting Chinese troops on this occasion, not the KPA.'

Lt Walt Bryan of the 39th FIS saw PVA troops for the first time shortly after his unit had been transferred to Yonpo AB (K-27) on 18 November;

'We had just moved up to Yonpo, southwest of Hamhung, in North Korea. There were two Mustang squadrons [39th and 40th FISs] and one F4U Marine unit [VMF-212] at the airfield. We were flying missions out of here when the Chinese entered the war. The first time I saw PVA troops they were riding small ponies, and we strafed them until we were out of ammo. There were dead bodies lying all over the place, but they just kept coming! When our forces started pulling out from their forward positions toward the south, we were covering some of the Marines as they braved the cold weather and an onslaught by Chinese troops occupying the high ridges in the Chosin Reservoir area.

'On my first mission in this area we patrolled over the ridge of a plateau, which was cold and desolate. When I saw our troops on the ice, with no cover, I wondered if any of these men would survive – but they did. Shortly after these missions commenced we were transferred from Yonpo back south to Pusan AB as the overwhelming force of the Chinese army was carrying everything before it.

MiGS

Eleven days earlier, on 7 November, 35th FBS flight commander 1Lt Harris S Boyce had become one of the first F-51 pilots to encounter the deadly MiG-15 in the air;

'My mission that day was to lead a flight of Mustangs on an armed reconnaissance close to the Manchurian border. At an altitude of approximately 12,000 ft, just south of the Yalu River, we flew a standard tactical formation, with the second element well out to my left. This gave the No 3 and No 4 pilots the best possible position for observing our "six o'clock", as well as giving them a good view of anything coming in from the north. We knew about the big MiG base at Antung, which was right across the river, and it was very visible as we got closer.

'After our flight had been in the area for about 15 minutes, one of my pilots sighted aircraft – MiGs – climbing in the opposite direction and above our flight at the "three o'clock" position. This would have put them

in a position to come down on us from out of the sun. We managed to keep the aircraft in sight as they started turning and diving toward us from the north, which was in our right-rear quadrant. I told the flight to be prepared to break hard to the right, into them, at my command. We also knew from our intelligence briefings that the MiG's armament was heavier than ours and had far greater range than our 0.50-cal guns. The jet was armed with two 23 mm and one 37 mm cannon, and even though they couldn't fire the number of rounds we could, one hit from a cannon shell of that size was enough to bring us down.

'With this in mind, I chose to start our turn into them early, hoping to stay out of range of their cannon. This proved to be a wise move. With our slower speed and better manoeuvrability, we managed to complete a 360-degree turn quickly enough to avoid their guns and be in a position behind two of the MiGs. By then, with the throttle pushed forward to the stops, the superchargers fully blown and the F-51 in a dive, I was just able to get in a good shot at two different MiGs. The first one I fired on was probably in the second element of the first flight to attack us. Because of our first quick turn, I was able to end up close enough behind him to get in a second burst with all six of my 0.50-cals! I could clearly see the flashes of API rounds as they struck the MiG's fuselage and canopy.

'Even though my Mustang was flying about as fast as it physically could, I could not keep up with the jets. The MiG I hit continued at a high rate of speed, diving in the direction of Manchuria in an erratic, apparently uncontrolled, flight. I followed it as far as the Yalu River, watching the MiG descend to a very low altitude that I would estimate was about 3000 ft. My wingman then told me another MiG was closing in on my "six o'clock" with plenty of speed. I pulled straight up and rolled out on top, heading south, with Lt Pagan, my wingman, still in position. After taking several more long-range shots to no avail, my ammo was just about gone. Somehow I ended up close behind another MiG, and managed one last burst, which hit him in his left wing. Both of his wing tanks flew off and sailed right past me way too close for comfort. Out of ammo and low on fuel, we headed back to Kimpo, staying at low altitude.

'My second element from the mission had become separated during the engagement, and they too had headed back to base. By the time we

F-51 pilots often went in very low over their targets, which meant that their aircraft were regularly hit by small-arms fire. Already boasting a replacement rudder following a previous brush with enemy AAA, this 12th FBS aircraft was struck again by ground fire in December 1950. Its pilot made it back to Suwon but ran off the runway on landing. Although the resulting ground loop inflicted yet more damage on the shot-up fighter, on a more positive note it meant that the runway remained open for other returning aircraft (*Tom Shockley*)

landed, news of the clash had already spread and our squadron commander met us at the ramp to get a first-hand debriefing. There was never any confirmation as to the fate of both of the MiGs. They were listed as "damaged", but it was a mission I'll never forget.'

A large number of the MiGs, with heavy battle damage, were written off upon landing, but there was no way for the American pilots to determine their final fate.

The communist jet fighters were particularly active on 7 November, with five Mustang flights being jumped in total. One incident involved Capt Claire Potter, Maj Ken Carlson and Lt Lee Gomes of the 12th FBS as they flew a routine patrol of 'two high and two low' in search of enemy troops. Instead of soldiers, they saw four MiGs take off from their base at Antung and head south, coming straight at the Mustangs. The F-51s stayed low and took the fight to the MiG pilots, who were making looping passes. Firing at the jets as they started to climb back up, Maj Carlson scored several hits, as did others in the formation.

The fight only lasted three or four minutes, immediately after which there was an explosion on the ground and only three MiG-15s were seen to cross the Yalu River. Nevertheless, the downed MiG was listed as a 'probable' only. Lt Gomes stated, 'If the MiGs had turned north after taking off it would have put them at a good advantage as they engaged the Mustangs'. All four of the USAF pilots in this fight agreed that, even though the MiGs' firing passes were ineffectual, the communist pilots demonstrated better flying skills than their Yak counterparts.

YAKS

The KPAF was also occasionally encountered, with Yak-9s and Il-10s sporadically leaving their bases in Manchuria and darting across the Yalu River. From here they were in a position to climb back up into Chinese airspace if threatened by UN aircraft.

During early November the 12th and 67th FBSs were routinely flying from Yonpo airfield and heading all the way up to the Yalu in search of Chinese troops that had already joined the fight. While the vast majority of Mustang pilots had not yet encountered a MiG, getting a Yak-9 to come across the river was certainly a possibility. For pilots on both sides who had to rise before dawn to fly early missions during those increasingly cold autumn days, it was very difficult to stay both warm and alert at the same time. Nevertheless, the Mustang pilots hunkered down in their cockpits and did what they had to do.

In late October Capt Alma R Flake had been leading a flight of 67th FBS Mustangs almost directly over the Yalu when they encountered MiG-15s for the first time. This brief clash was still firmly in his mind as he headed north towards Manchuria on 1 November. 'It was the MiGs that we had to worry about', Flake recalled. 'I had been heading up a flight when two of them made a formation pass – they missed us and then flew north of the Yalu to safety. On one of these passes, when I was out of range, I still fired the guns, trying to get some gun camera film. This was one of the first pieces of evidence that the enemy was using the MiG-15. The film went all the way to the top, and to the UN. This helped prompt the transfer of

the 4th FIW to the Far East. My fellow Mustang pilots and naval aviators flying the F4U Corsair had been warning the FEAF for days about the movement of Chinese infantry and the appearance of the MiG-15.

'During the first 48 hours of November my flight encountered several Yak-type aircraft [Flake claimed that they were Yak-3s, but no such aircraft were ever supplied to the KPAF – these were Yak-9s]. We engaged them and shot down three. The first occurred during a low-altitude mission right below the Yalu. Four Yaks in elements of two crossed the river on a southerly heading, just east of our position. Their movement was called out by Lt Ausman. I ordered the flight to climb at maximum power and assume combat formation. Almost immediately the Yaks began a diving attack. As we came around behind the lead Yak, I fired a short burst and broke to his left and down. I proceeded to engage, continuing a maximum right turn, and lost sight of him for just a moment. He was well below my position and, looking down, I picked him up again and manoeuvred to attack. It was evident that he had lost sight of me because he continued in a gentle climbing turn. This enabled me to gain a favourable firing position from behind and slightly inside his circle.

'Having already expended some of my ammunition on ground targets, I did not want to open fire until I had attained the optimum range. At a slight overtaking speed, and estimating a range of about 600 ft, I pulled the trigger. Almost immediately the Yak began trailing smoke, and a few seconds later the pilot levelled the aircraft off and bailed out. The aircraft spiralled down and crashed. The pilot had a good 'chute and probably survived.

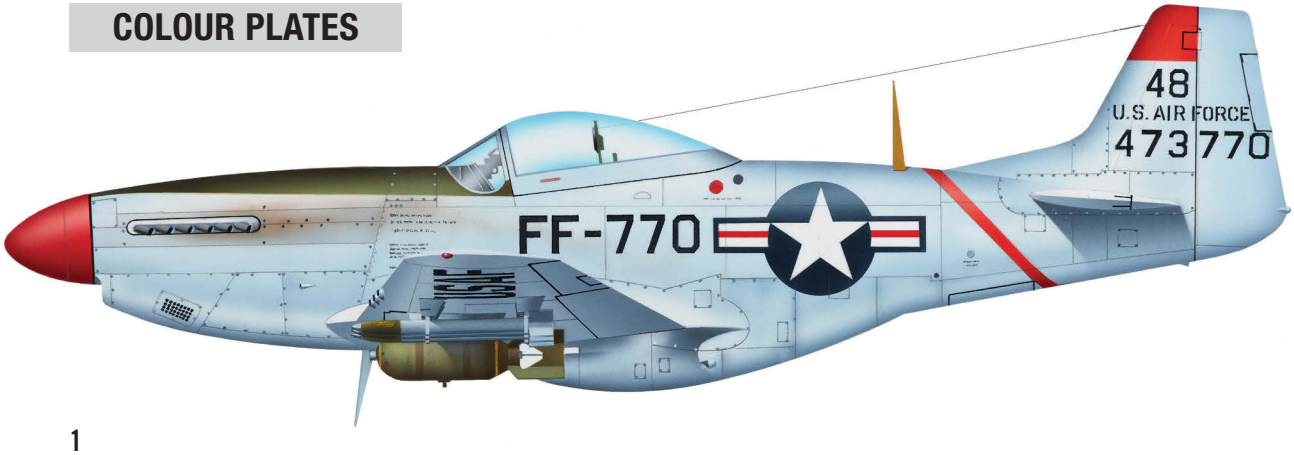
'As I pulled away, as expected, "Ace" Ausman, my wingman, was right where he was supposed to be. He was a young and outstanding wingman. I had no fear that we would be surprised by a bogie or that he would fail to provide cover while I was engaged with the enemy.

'The remaining three Yaks escaped back north of the river. The wingman of the first element circled the area until he saw his leader bail out, then headed north. The other two broke off their attack before coming into range, diving above the ground and crossing the river before our element, in hot pursuit, could catch up. My impression was that these pilots were quite inexperienced and unskilled.

'The following day, near the same area, we were again attacked by four Yak fighters. This time the combat lasted longer because it was pursued more vigorously by both sides. The pilot I fought was obviously highly trained and eager to engage. After we passed each other in a head-on pass, I pulled up almost vertically in order to gain altitude, while slowing my speed to quicken my turn. At my next sight of him he was above me and his nose was almost on me. Closing so fast, I figured he would probably be firing before I could get into position to attack him. Rolling and inverting, I headed straight down, with a most uneasy feeling that he was close behind me.

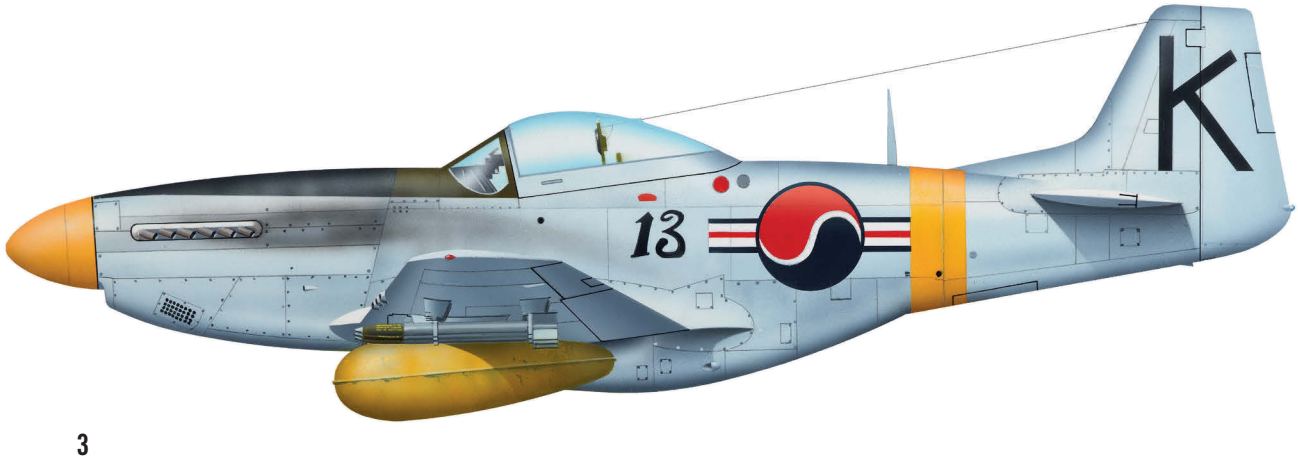
'I cannot recall the details of the gyrations that ensued. Knowing that I could not turn with him, I felt my life depended on gaining the airspeed and altitude advantage. I used every ounce of power and speed of my Mustang to overcome his superior manoeuvrability. It ended in a series of vertical moves at 9000-10,000 ft, before we headed straight back down again. He would hold the Yak in the vertical climb until it appeared to stop in mid-air, fall backwards and spin out. (*Text continues on page 43.*)

COLOUR PLATES



1
F-51D-25 44-73770 of the 40th FIS/35th FBG, Pusan West AB (K-1), spring 1951

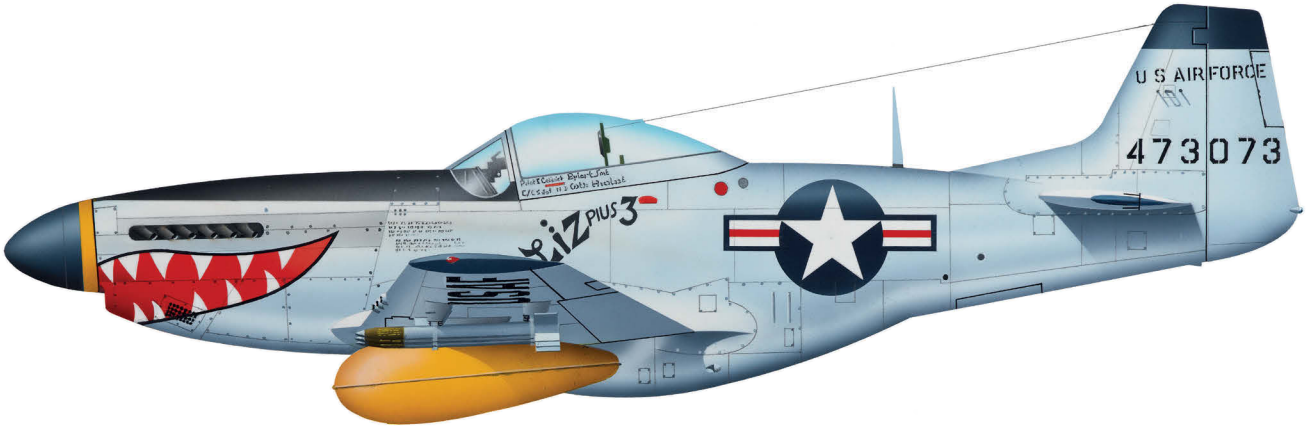
2
F-51D-30 44-74283 of the 80th FIS/8th FBG, Seoul City AB (K-16), December 1950



3
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn, RoKAF, Pohang AB (K-3), July 1950

4
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn, RoKAF, Chinhae AB (K-10), August 1950

5
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn/10th FG, RoKAF, Kangnung (K-18), autumn 1951



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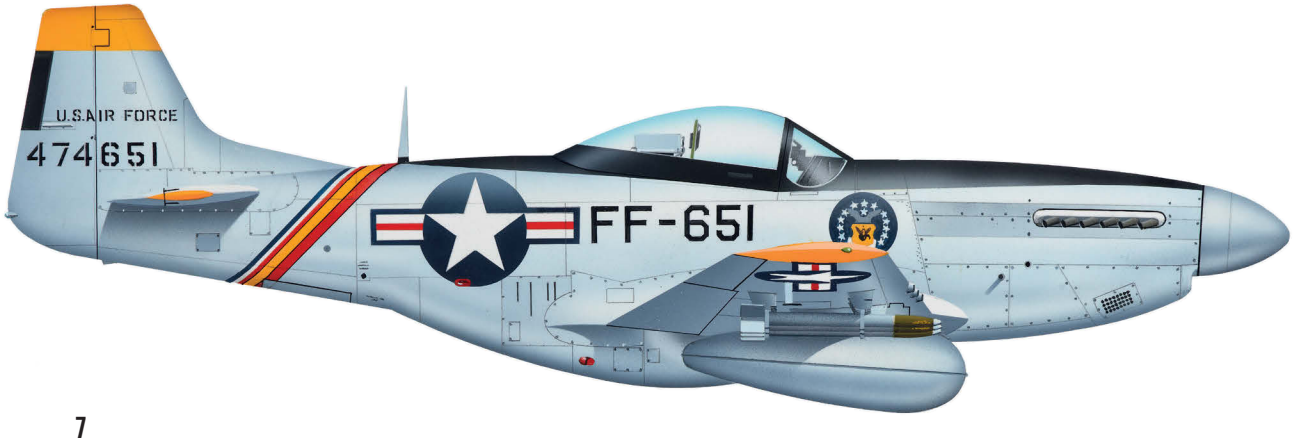
F-51D-25 44-73073 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Seoul City AB (K-16), summer 1951



7

F-51D-30 44-74651 of Col William H Clark, 18th FBG CO, Hoengsong AB (K-46), July 1952

8

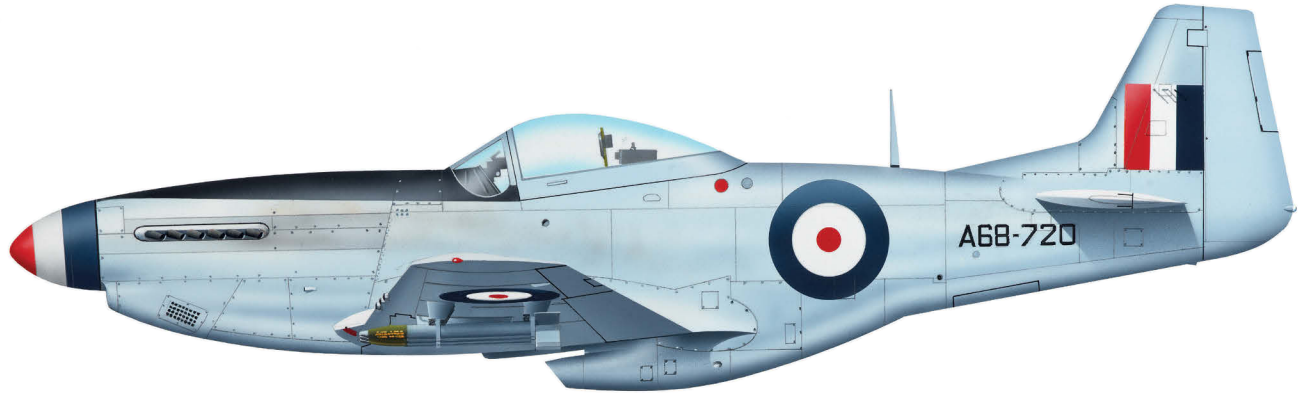
F-51D-25 44-73038 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1951

9

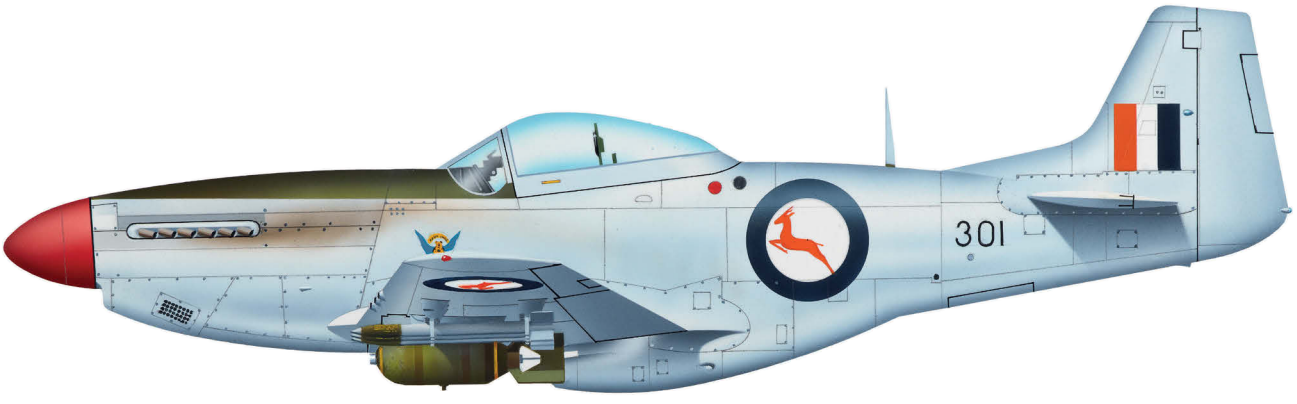
F-51D-30 44-74384 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1951

10
F-51D-30 44-74412 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Chinhae AB (K-10), March 1951

11
F-51D-30 44-74840 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952



12
F-51D-25 A68-720 (44-84482) of No 77 Sqn, RAAF, Pusan East (K-9), March 1951



13
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 2 Sqn, SAAF, Pyongyang East AB (K-24), December 1950

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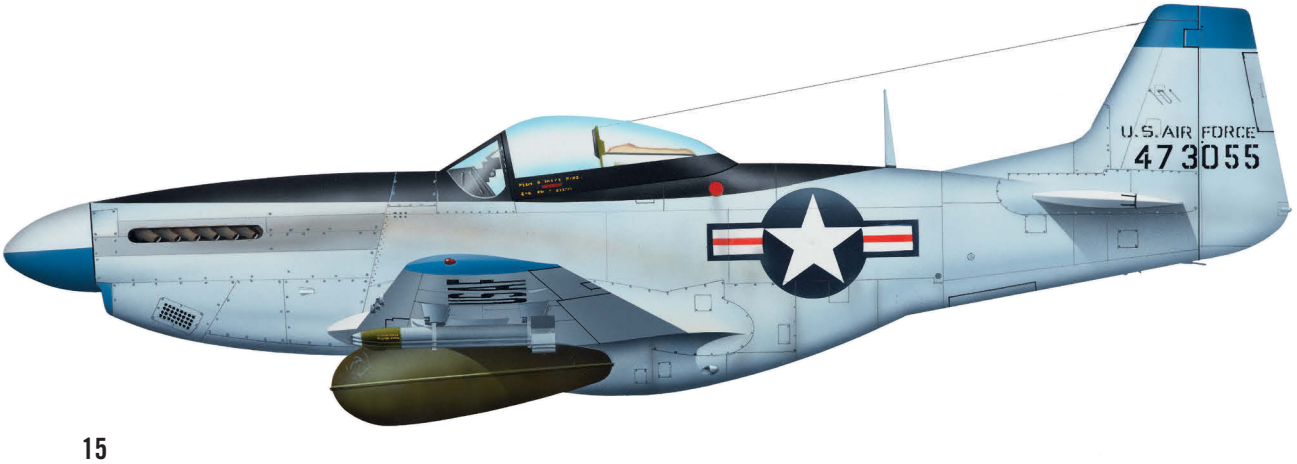

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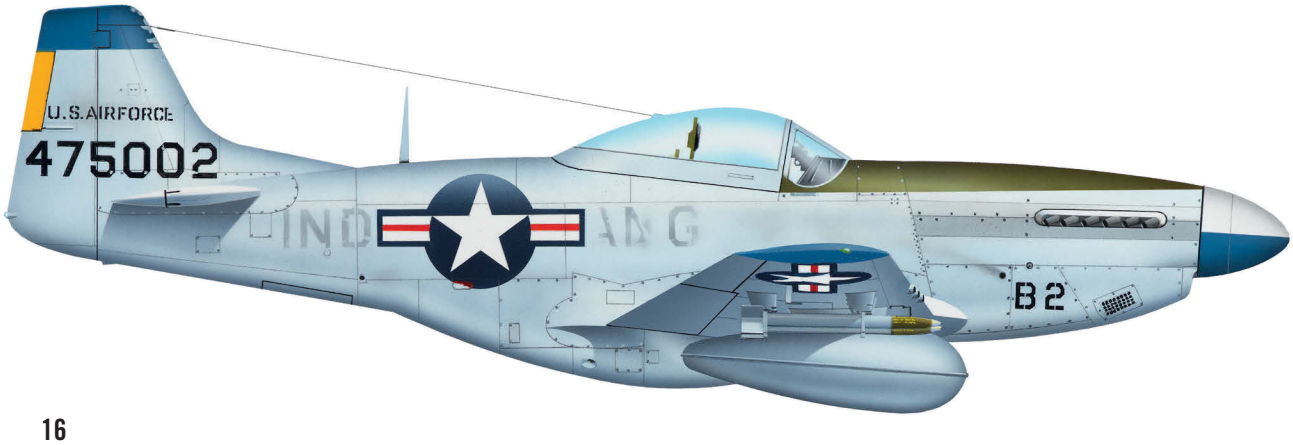
F-51D-25 44-73055 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, August 1950



16
F-51D-30 44-75002 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, August 1950

17
F-51D-30 45-11735 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB (K-2), spring 1951

18
RF-51D-25 44-84835 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB (K-2), July 1951

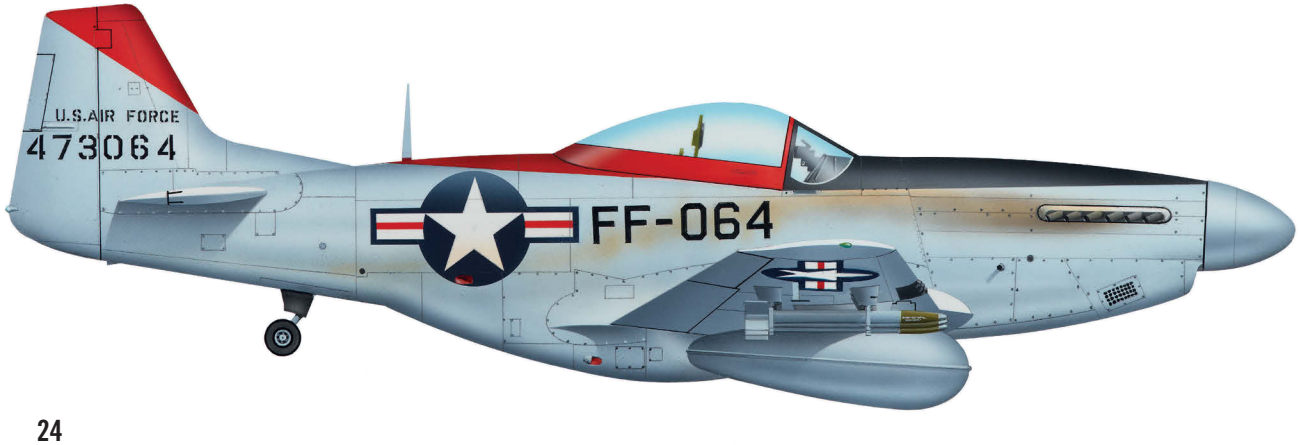
19
F-51D-25 45-11410 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB (K-2), summer 1951

20
F-51D-30 45-11613 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Kimpo AB (K-14), September 1951

21
F-51D-30 44-74597 of the 39th FIS/18th FBG, Seoul City AB (K-16), August 1951

22
F-51D-30 44-74268 of the 39th FIS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), spring 1952

23
F-51D-30 44-74383 of the 40th FIS/35th FBG, Pusan West AB (K-1), winter 1950



24
F-51D-25 44-73064 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), summer 1952

25
F-51D-25 44-84898 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

26
F-51D-25 44-84865 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), summer 1952

27
F-51D-25 44-73912 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

28
F-51D-30 44-74625 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

29
F-51D-25 44-84959 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Osan AB (K-55), January 1953

30
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn/10th FG, RoKAF, Kangnung (K-18), spring 1953

Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell are greeted by 18th FBG CO Col Curtis R Low at Chinhae in early 1951. Hope and his accompanying entertainers spent a lot of time in Korea, along with Bing Crosby. The 18th FBG had a lot of contact with the entertainment world, with the famous cartoonist Al Capp, creator of the *Li'l Abner* strip, becoming an honorary member of the group. Indeed, he contributed the famous 'Dogpatch' emblem that became the main patch worn by pilots assigned to the group. It featured 'Li'l Abner' piloting an F-51, with 'Nancy O' riding on its tail (*Robert Cusick*)

The only shots I came close to getting off were when he peaked at the top. I would gain on him at the top of the climb, but just as I got in range he would tumble back, and you cannot hit a spinning target. After three or four such manoeuvres I apparently got in some hits as he approached his peak again. He seemed to break out of his climb prematurely and head straight down. He pulled out very low over rolling hills and headed north. I was able to reach a good position behind him, slightly above and to the right. As I fired, his right wing appeared to pull away at the root. The Yak rolled abruptly and crashed, spreading flames and debris over a large area.

'When I pulled up I observed another dogfight in progress, with the Yak manoeuvring in much the same way as the one I had just fought – it turned out to be one of the guys in my flight. By this time we were all low on ammunition and fuel, so we broke off the fight and returned to base. We enjoyed some celebrating that night. For the remainder of my tour I had no further opportunity to engage any North Korean aircraft.'

Like Capt Flake, fellow 67th FBS pilot Capt Robert D Thresher had encountered Yak-9s on 1 November;

'Takeoff was at 0700 hrs and our old Mustangs were up to the task. They fired right up and we launched for a mission that was being controlled by a FAC. It seems that one of our tank columns had hit a roadblock, so we were going to try and pry the door open for them. The two F-51s ahead of me made their runs and drew no flak, so I figured we weren't going to get any interference from the ground. I pressed it close and showered the roadblock with 0.50-cal rounds, and the lead tank started moving right on through with no resistance. We pretty well tore the roadblock apart, allowing the lead tank to move on through with no resistance.

'We hung around the area and got another call from the FAC about some ox carts loaded with supplies. I figured this was going to be one of those days with no excitement. Although the KPAF had been decimated in the early part of the war, it still had quite a few fast Russian-built World War 2 aircraft, and in the early stages of the conflict they were safely sheltered north of the Yalu. Flying around in that area, heavily infested with F-80s and F9F Panthers, during periods of nice weather proved to be suicidal for the enemy pilots. However, when the weather was marginal or bad they knew they had a better chance of survival.

'As I observed the others in my flight attack the ox carts, suddenly these big orange balls of fire began zipping across my left wing. At first I called out "Flak" and broke right, but before I could yell it twice an ominous shape hurtled by me and I knew we weren't getting fired on from the ground because a Yak-9 pilot had me in his sights. I squinted and looked up into the sun to try and find him. Glancing over to where the other Mustangs were, I saw them chasing a single Yak, and I was rapidly dropping out of the picture. I shoved the throttle forward and made an effort to get in on the chase in the hope of getting a share of the kill.

'The Yak series of aircraft were formidable fighters, and they had given the Luftwaffe all they could handle on the Eastern Front during World War 2. They had a 7000-lb maximum gross weight and were described by many USAF pilots as a "kite", which was meant as a compliment. The Yak could out-turn and out-climb the F-51, and the only things we had going for us were that North American Aviation had produced one hell of a tough fighter and the pilots who flew F-51s were far better trained than their KPAF opponents. These Soviet-made aircraft very seldom worked as singles, so if you saw one you had better have one eye cocked wide open for the second one.

12th FBS F-51D-25 44-73648 taxies past the tower at Chinhae (the 18th FBG's principal base during early 1951) after completing a mission at first light. This aircraft served with the unit until it suffered an in-flight fire on 10 April 1952 that forced the pilot to bail out over the sea – he was quickly rescued (*Tom Shockley*)

'As my Mustang accelerated, the FAC yelled out "Watch out No 4, he is right on your tail!" I snapped my head around and saw the yellow winking lights of a Yak's two 12.7 mm machine guns and the 20 mm cannon. He'd been sitting up there all this time, and now I was in his sights. I broke so hard that I greyed-out, and I knew that the Yak could turn inside me. In my panic I held the turn, somehow hoping that he would not be able to follow after his firing pass. Fortunately, he had gone across the top and, with his advantage of speed, he pulled up into a tight loop. That was all he needed, because when he came out of the loop he'd be perched right back there on my tail again – only this time he had speed to burn.'

At this point in any dogfight the experience and skill of the pilot plays a critical role in the outcome. You can have the faster fighter, but when it gets 'close and personal' you had better hope that your opponent has not had a lot of combat experience. Thresher's opponent had his eyes glued on the Mustang for too long, pulling too hard on his control column and stalling his fighter out. As the Yak-9 spun all the way down from 6000 ft, Thresher rolled back into a turn, hoping to come out behind it. The Yak, however, was spinning down the axis of the circle that the Mustang was making. The enemy pilot recovered and, as he was just coming out of the spin, Thresher tried to tighten his turn and come around behind him. The Yak pilot countered by performing a fast, steep climb.

'While at the top of his second loop, the enemy pilot slackened off gently and began the dive downward. That manoeuvre set the pattern for this fight. I was flying a tight circle on the horizontal and my opponent

The entry of the PVA into the Korean conflict in October 1950 soon saw the UN advance turn into a retreat. As communist troops pushed toward Pyongyang in early November, these F-51 crewmen at Yonpo AB, close to the North Korean capital, were ordered to burn everything that could not be flown out in USAF C-47s and C-119s. The Mustangs parked in the background belonged to the 35th and 36th FBSs (*Homer Hansen*)

The pullout of both troops and squadron personnel from Pyongyang in November 1950 was a major undertaking, the 18th FBG continuing to fly missions in an effort to stall the Chinese advance until the very last Allied soldiers and airmen had left. Behind the C-54s waiting to airlift more personnel south are a handful of RoKAF Mustangs to the left and USAF F-51s to the right. The armed soldiers in the foreground were charged with defending the UN transport aircraft against communist infiltrators (*James Peek*)

decided to fly a sparring circle on the vertical, snapping at me as we passed each other. We held our turns and I looked for a break as he picked up speed, and I noticed that we were getting closer each time we closed on the south side of my circle. We were rapidly getting out of phase, and I was able to snap a shot at him each time now.

'The enemy pilot was good, but he realised that after one more pass I'd be coming in behind him as he began his climb. This seemed to unnerve him, because he wobbled at the top of his next loop. After the Yak faltered I added throttle and waited him out. He fell unevenly this time, and I cut wide briefly. At the bottom he recovered and began his pull-up, but luckily my timing was good. I wrapped up my Mustang and, while I was in my turn, began firing. I saw tracers converge on both wings. I eased the rudder to the right to keep him in sight. Then a long blue plume of smoke began to trail from one of his wings and he wobbled and fell out of his turn. He slowly rolled over and went into a long glide. I watched the Yak go down – a leftover from World War 2, just as my fighter and I were. On the flight back I thought about the duel with the North Korean pilot resulting in a kill, and it was rewarding to me to know that after almost six years I still knew how to fight.'

Five days later (6 November) Mustang pilots from the 67th FBS again ran into Russian-built piston-engined fighters while flying a deep penetration mission into North Korea in an attempt to sever the main supply routes into the country from communist China. PVA troops were now beginning to overrun the forward positions held by UN forces and MiG-15 pilots were becoming more brazen south of the Yalu River. On the 6th Capt Howard I Price, one of the 67th FBS's more experienced pilots, was leading a mission shortly after his unit had had to abandon Pyongyang AB (K-23) for Chinhae (K-10). Price had fled the communist advance in a Mustang that had only one operable magneto – it was either that or abandoning it there and having to make the long journey south to Chinhae in the back of a truck.

'I led four aircraft aloft from Suwon AB and climbed to altitude – usually 5000 to 10,000 ft, depending on what area we were to cover', Capt Price recalled. 'Not long after takeoff my No 4 had to abort about the time we hit the 38th Parallel. The remaining three in the flight headed up to Sinuiju, each of our aircraft armed with four 4.5-in rockets and a full load of 0.50-cal ammo. Our mission was to provide reconnaissance for enemy road traffic bringing in supplies from Manchuria. While we were close to the MiG-15 base at Antung, we kept a close eye both on the road and over our shoulders to make sure that the MiGs were not coming in on us. We could see dust being kicked up at Antung from jets having their engines run up before takeoff.

'On this mission it was Yak-9s, not MiGs, that came up at us from east of the Yalu River, my wingman, 1Lt George Olsen, calling them out. They were climbing up from our "nine o'clock" position, and there were six of them in no specific formation. I turned into them so I could identify them

as enemy aircraft, and although I could not see any insignia I knew they were Yak-9s. I called out to the remaining two in my flight, "They are Yaks. Let's get them."

'1Lt Olsen and I dived on the closest Yak. He saw us and panicked, snap-rolling and diving away. I picked up the one closest to him. He started to turn sharply left away from the other aircraft and also snap rolled. I followed him down for a few seconds, and while he was turning I clobbered him. Pieces flew off, his engine quit and the pilot bailed out. What surprised me was his parachute was square, unlike our round ones. I didn't see where he landed, as I was busy swinging around trying to get onto the tail of another Yak. All I saw was Reynolds chasing a lone aircraft, which meant the others must have dived for the ground.

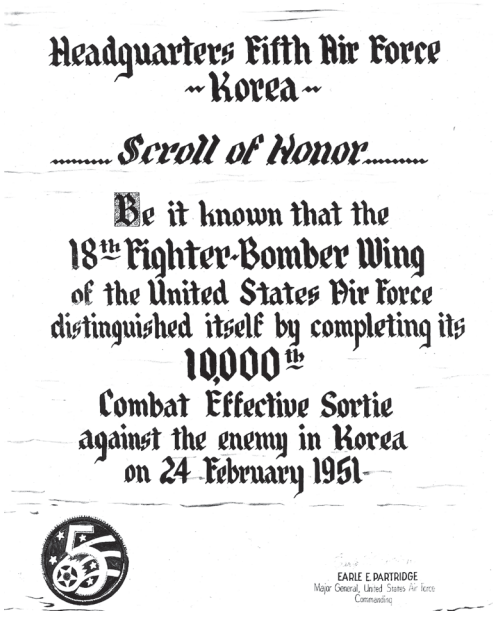
'The Yaks were much slower that our F-51s, and as I joined up with Reynolds he told me over the radio that his guns had jammed. The Yak was trying to head north to get back across the Yalu to safety. I slid down and across as Reynolds pulled off. I fired each of my rockets, trying to save the ammo. Each rocket missed – one went over and one under the Yak's wings. These rockets were absolutely worthless as they had been stored on Guam since 1945 and the propellant had solidified on the low side of each round. Putting it in golfing terms, you didn't know whether the rockets would slice or hook!

'I then lined up slightly below the enemy fighter and fired my 0.50-cals, hitting the Yak in the cockpit and the engine. I fired three or four bursts, as I remembered that the Yaks were supposed to be armoured. All of a sudden bluish flames started coming out of the engine. At the same time as the fighter nosed over, all of its guns started firing. The aeroplane was soon in an almost vertical dive, and I think one of my rounds must have killed the pilot for he made no effort to pull out. I watched him all the way down to where he hit the ground close to Sinuiju.'

The USAF credited Price with 1.5 kills that day.

F-51 pilots would have to wait three more months before their next encounter with the KPAF, and again the 67th FBS was in the thick of the action. On 5 February 1951 the unit CO, Maj Arnold 'Moon' Mullins, and his wingman 1Lt Harold J Ausman were returning from an interdiction mission north of the 38th Parallel when they were forced to climb above a broken cloud layer in order to exit the rugged mountain valley in which they had recently made their attacks. Coming across a hole in the clouds a few miles northeast of Seoul, and looking for recognisable landmarks, Maj Mullins and his wingman let down through the undercast and unexpectedly found themselves overtaking a pair of single-engined aeroplanes directly ahead of them. After a quick doubletake, Mullins realised they were not F-51 Mustangs. They were not even friendly aircraft – they were Russian-built Yak-9s.

With the F-51s' considerable speed advantage, descending from the rear, Mullins quickly assessed the situation and told Ausman to take the Yak on the right while he attacked the one on the left. Their dive from high altitude through the cloud caught the enemy pilots completely by surprise. Mullins


Headquarters Fifth Air Force
~Korea~

Scroll of Honor

Be it known that the
18th Fighter-Bomber Wing
of the United States Air Force
distinguished itself by completing its
10,000th
Combat Effective Sortie
against the enemy in Korea
on 24 February 1951

EARLE E PARTRIDGE
Major General, United States Air Force
Commanding

The 18th FBW (which controlled the 18th FBG) received this 'Scroll of Honor' directly from Maj Gen Earle E Partridge, commander of the Fifth Air Force, after its Mustang squadrons completed their 10,000th sortie on 24 February 1951. By early July 1952 the Wing had flown more than 45,000 sorties (*Maj Gen Earle Partridge*)

pressed his trigger and the Yak-9 immediately exploded in flames with his first burst. He saw it dive sharply into the ground. No parachute was seen.

Ausman was even more startled by their sudden, amazing stroke of luck, offering him such an opportunity for an aerial kill. In fact he was so preoccupied with his luck that he misjudged his high rate of closure on the target. When he fired he too managed a few hits, but was unable to destroy the Yak-9 on his first firing pass. Instead, to his utter dismay, he found the momentum of his dive was carrying him helplessly past the enemy – he was overtaking the target and drifting right into the sights of his quarry. Where, moments before, he had been the attacker, he was suddenly and very unhappily becoming a sitting duck for the Yak pilot, who was about to be offered a beautiful straight-on close-astern shot at his attacker.

Chopping his throttle completely and fanning the rudder to skid his aeroplane in an attempt to lose excess speed, Ausman continued to pass the Yak's right side. 'Dive under', he heard Mullins shout over his radio, and Ausman did as he was told. He hit the throttle, dived sharply and turned left under the enemy fighter as Mullins, who, fortunately, was still behind the surviving Yak, swung quickly and easily into trail position and shot the second KPAF fighter down with a burst from his 0.50-cals. Mullins claimed two victories, although he would never receive credit for the second kill.

The late winter and early spring presented the Mustang pilots with some rather questionable weather, but by early June conditions were perfect and a lot of sorties were flown. In fact the weather was so good in southern Manchuria that the KPAF started sending down its Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes on nocturnal nuisance raids, in one instance attacking Kimpo. This was the first airfield raid witnessed by the Mustang-equipped No 2 Sqn South African Air Force (SAAF), which had joined the 18th FBG in late November 1950 – see chapter four for details.

On 20 June, while the 18th FBG was flying a mass effort against communist forces north of Pyongyang, it again encountered KPAF fighters. This pitched the Mustangs against Yak-9s and Il-10s, which meant that they were fighting 'prop to prop'. Aircraft from No 2 Sqn SAAF and the 12th and 67th FBSs were all involved in the engagement, with pilots from the latter unit claiming six enemy aeroplanes damaged or shot down out of a force of 12. All bar one of the kill claims were downgraded to probables, however.

The only victory (the last aerial success credited to the F-51 in Korea) was awarded to 1Lt James B Harrison of the 67th FBS, who recalled the incident;

'We were about 15 minutes into destroying some targets when word reached us that there were six bogies below us, and our flight lead told us to go down and identify the aircraft. As we approached the enemy aeroplanes they saw us coming and turned in towards us. As my flight leader made a firing pass on one of the aircraft, his wingman turned right into me and I was able to get onto his tail. I fired several bursts and the Yak-9 caught fire. The pilot immediately rolled over and bailed out. My only comment was that the pilot was evidently straight out of flight school, with no training in combat situations.'

Fellow 67th FBS pilot Capt Bruce Clark caught an Il-10 in his sights;

'I thought I had destroyed the aeroplane on my first pass, but I had to go around again. Fortunately, I got the tail gunner on the first pass, so I

didn't have to worry about him. On the second pass my rounds impacted on his left wing and engine, and as he dropped his nose I followed him down until he blew up.'

Unfortunately the review board only gave Clark a 'probable'. Capt Landell Hames also stated that he jumped an Il-10;

'On my first pass I knocked his right main wheel off. As I pulled up to keep from hitting the wheel, he broke and went down under the overcast. I stayed just above him, where I could keep him in sight. Then I knocked the tail turret out just as the left wing tank burst open, so I had to pull up again, for I was flying in a cloud of gas. Just as he was about to hit the water his left wing broke off.'

Once again, the 67th FBS pilot was credited with a 'probable'. For some reason or another, the gun camera film of the demise of both Il-10s did not give proof enough of their destruction. The same thing happened with many other pilots, robbing them of confirmed victories.

The 18th FBG occasionally encountered MiG-15s during this period too, especially when they were attacking targets in sight of the Yalu River. Fortunately, not many were costly, as the F-84s and F-86s that were providing top cover for them usually kept the communist jets at bay. However, in late June 1951 a flight of four F-51s lacking any fighter protection was jumped over enemy territory by six MiG-15s just as the 67th FBS aircraft had finished dropping napalm and firing their rockets at a vehicle convoy. The Mustang flight lead on this occasion was Capt William Strand, a seven-victory ace from World War 2 who had been shot down by AAA behind enemy lines two months earlier.

The first two MiGs made a firing pass on Capt K M Stevens, while another element lined up on his wingman, 1Lt Joe Babasa. The latter soon took several hits, although this did not slow his fighter down. As the MiG that had attacked Babasa shot past him and then started to pull out, one of his squadronmates scored some hits on the jet before yelling over the radio that he was out of ammunition. Babasa was right behind the Mustang as it stopped firing, so he responded to the threat instead. He fired several short bursts and scored hits on the MiG's wings and fuselage before also exhausting his ammunition. 'He seemed to hang in mid-air for just a second before starting his dive, and that is when I fired again', Babasa later reported. 'If I had had a few more seconds of ammo left I could have nailed him.'

The MiG pilot immediately gained altitude and headed north for his base in Antung. The four Mustangs then headed south, their tally for the mission standing at six enemy trucks, two locomotives and three flat cars.

This was the second time that 1Lt Babasa had fought MiG-15s, his first encounter with the aircraft – on 25 February 1951 – resulting in him receiving the Silver Star. The citation that accompanied this decoration read as follows;

Having returned safely from a mission, this storeless F-51D of the 39th FIS was photographed motoring along a PSP taxiway at 'Dogpatch Airbase' (Chinhae) in the spring of 1951. Although the Mustang took austere operating conditions such as these in its stride, they would have been unsuitable for jet types such as the F-80, F-84 and F-86 (*Joe Dishongh*)

This was perhaps the most unusual Mustang to serve in Korea, as it consisted of parts salvaged from several battle-damaged F-51s by the 18th Field Maintenance Squadron (FMS) at Chinhae. Constructed under the supervision of Maj Milt Tarr, this perfectly airworthy Mustang was given the spurious code 'FF-800' – it never officially appeared on the USAF's inventory, however. The enlisted members of the 18th FMS presented the F-51 to the unit's CO, Maj Bill Myers, as a birthday gift, as he did not have his own aircraft. Not cleared for combat missions, the Mustang was instead used as a DDT sprayer, the chemicals used to kill mosquito larvae during the hot summer months being released from the fighter's matt black external drop tanks (*Milt Tarr*)

The 18th FMS personnel involved in assembling 'FF-800' surround Maj Milt Tarr (fourth from left in the front row) and Maj Bill Myers (wearing the life preserver) shortly before the latter took the aeroplane aloft for its first post-rebuild test flight (*Milt Tarr*)

'Lt Babasa was element leader of a four-ship of F-51 aeroplanes despatched to attack a reported convoy in the vicinity of Kuni-Ri, Korea. Because of the numerous lucrative targets, the flight remained in the area until a shortage of ammunition forced withdrawal. Just as the flight regrouped for the return flight, it was attacked from the rear by four enemy MiG-15 aeroplanes. Lt Babasa's aircraft was severely damaged in the right wing and he was wounded in the left hand. He was enjoined by his flight leader either to seek protection by remaining with the other flight members or to bail out if conditions warranted. Instead, Lt Babasa, disregarding his own safety, turned to attack a MiG-15 in an effort to draw fire away from his comrades. By skilful manoeuvring he scored several hits on the enemy fighter. Lt Babasa met six more attacks head on, in spite of his wound, a battle-damaged aeroplane and no ammunition.'

Joe Babasa's luck finally ran out on 9 July when he was one of two pilots from the 18th FBG killed attacking an airfield near Pyongyang. According to his CO at the time, Lt Col Robert Pasqualicchio, 'He was last seen "rolling into his dive". Babasa was flying No 3 in the lead flight, whose mission was flak suppression of known positions around the airstrip. He was an extremely aggressive and competent pilot who would have pressed home his attack with extreme disregard for his personal safety.' By July 1951 Babasa had completed the magic 100 missions to complete his tour, and he was awaiting rotation orders when his brother, serving with the 1st Marine Division, was killed in action. He received permission to remain in combat until his brother's body was ready for escort back to the USA. 'He was on his 106th mission, flying flak suppression, when he rolled into his dive bomb run and disappeared', Lt Col Pasqualicchio recalled.

Since just about all of the targets being hit by the 18th FBG were north of the bomb line, it meant a lot to downed pilots to get a helicopter or an SA-16 Albatross amphibian expeditiously to where they had come down. In many cases, however, aviators were too deep into North Korea to be rescued. One of the lucky ones to be retrieved – in early 1951 – was 1Lt Ralph Clark, whose F-51 was struck by AAA while attacking an enemy supply dump. With his aircraft hit several times over the target,

all Clark could do was fly several miles away from the dump before taking to his parachute. He duly landed in the swollen and muddy Taedong River, close to the port city of Chinnampo. The call went out for an SA-16, which could alight in the middle of the river. Corsairs from the 1st Marine Air Wing and F-84s from the 49th Fighter Group (FG) continually strafed snipers trying to pick off Lt Clark while the amphibian was en route to the downed aviator. It took just 21 minutes for the SA-16 to reach Clark, who was swiftly picked up and returned to base.

There were many similar shoot-downs in which the enemy got to the pilot first, or the aviator in question was too far from UN lines to allow a rescue mission to be mounted.

POWERPLANT STRIKES

Project *Lights Out* started in the summer of 1951, during the time when the UN was keen to commence peace talks with North Korea. With the communists showing little interest in such discussions, Gen Otto P Weyland, the new commanding general of the FEAF and UN Air Forces in Korea, told Fifth Air Force planners that North Korea's hydroelectric powerplants, which had up to now been off limits for bombing, were legally military targets. He believed that if they were destroyed, there was a strong possibility that factories in the north would be forced to cease production of military goods, which in turn might also cause the North Koreans to engage in peace talks. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the plan and ordered the attacks.

The powerplant strikes began on 23 June, with the 18th FBG being tasked with putting up a major force to hit Fusan Dams Nos 2 and 4. The group returned the next day to pound these targets once more. Fifth Air Force continued its strikes against both the Choshin and Fusan plants for a further 48 hours, and by the end of the fourth day 90 per cent of the North Korean power system had been knocked out. The final photo-reconnaissance showed that of the 13 plants attacked, 11 were unserviceable and two were only partially operable. This series of strikes brought the talks back to a more serious level.

Summer weather was always welcome when repairing Mustangs after a mission, as such work nearly always took place in the open. This 12th FBS aircraft is having its Packard Merlin engine fettled at Chinhae prior to the ordnance team arriving to arm the fighter with 5-in rockets, napalm canisters and 0.50-cal ammunition. The crew chief and his assistant have fashioned a temporary work stand from old packing cases (*James Peek*)

Capt Jim Byers of the 12th FBS participated in the dam strikes, as well as the follow-up missions across North Korea;

'For the next couple of weeks after the Fusan raids we ran missions up to Sinanju, Kuni-Ri, Sunchon and Sonchon. Most of the time we were in sight of the Yalu River, but we were not able to cross it to where the enemy was really thriving, with a lot of targets, due to the UN hamstringing us. All of us pilots played this like a football game in that we drove the enemy back to the goal line and then gave them the ball back on the 20-yard line! I guess most of the people at home had stated that it was "Truman's War". We thought that the communists were trying to uproot our ally in South Korea, and this led to the start of the now infamous peace talks at Panmunjom [which took place between October 1951 and July 1953]. Just about all of the pilots flying in the 18th felt this way.'

The 18th FBG's CO at this critically important time was Col William P McBride, who had joined the unit in May 1951 after the 35th FBG, which he had led for just three months, returned to Japan to be re-equipped with F-80Cs. A combat veteran from World War 2 (in North Africa and in Western Europe), McBride occasionally flew with Capt Duane 'Bud' Biteman as his wingman;

'McBride was a hard man to fly wing on. Like most old-time colonels, he didn't pay much attention to his wingman, and simply wanted you to stay in sight as he weaved down low in the valleys. So when I flew with him I kept him in sight and stayed out of his way. As a result he could easily have turned right into me as he searched for targets, so on many occasions I had to chop my throttle full off and turn into a sharp pull-up to keep him from hitting me! It was for this reason that, on most of these missions, I didn't get to drop my ordnance. I was too busy trying to keep Col McBride from running too far ahead or hitting me.

'On this particular day I was following the colonel down a railroad track as he prepared to drop his bombs into a tunnel. I decided to drop my bombs at the same time because, with the narrow canyon, I knew I would have to pull up early to miss the colonel's bomb blast! He made a good skip, right into the tunnel, and I toggled mine off and immediately went into a steep climb to the right. He climbed straight ahead, right over the top of the ridge above the tunnel, and as he did so he took a burst of small-arms fire into the right panel of his windscreen, shattering the Plexiglas and stinging him alongside his right eye. He was hurt, but he didn't know how badly.

'There had been a lot of smoke coming out of the tunnel, so there was no telling what we had hit. Nevertheless, any boxcars in the tunnel were goners. We headed back to base, with the colonel fighting the pain and trying to keep his Mustang on the straight and narrow. He went in first and made a good landing with me right behind.

'Once on the ground the colonel discovered that he'd been hit by a 0.30-cal slug that had penetrated the skin next to his skull, barely missing his right eye, and had lodged there. Stunned and temporarily blinded, he was able to bring his aeroplane back and, after a week in the hospital, his eyes were again almost as good as new and he was out flying combat missions once more. McBride went on to make a splendid name for himself as a group, wing and, finally, air division commander, retiring many years later as a two-star major-general.'

18th FBG – MUSTANG CENTRAL

The 39th FIS was one of four F-51-equipped squadrons assigned to the 18th FBG in the summer of 1951, the Seoul City-based unit being the last group exclusively equipped with Mustangs in Korea following the transition of the 8th and 35th FBGs to the F-80C. On 30 August the 18th FBG became the first group to chalk up its 25,000th sortie in Korea when Capt Winett A Coomer completed a dangerous CAS mission. Just a year earlier, a Mustang from the 18th had taken off from Taegu to log the group's first mission. After telling the assembled press their story, the pilots and groundcrews went back to work. The group CO, Col William P McBride, gave reporters the brief quote '25,000 sorties – that is a lot of trips north of the bomb line'. Fourteen months later, the group logged its 45,000th sortie. By then it was down to three squadrons, the 39th FIS having converted to the F-86 Sabre and become part of the 51st FIW.

One of the pilots to contribute to the 18th FBG's burgeoning tally of sorties was Maj Murrit H Davis, who had become CO of the 39th FIS after being posted in from the 41st FIS, which was still providing the air defence of Japan with its Shooting Stars. Davis was considered a very capable CO and a vastly experienced fighter pilot, having flown more than 145 missions in P-39 Airacobras and P-40 Warhawks in the South Pacific with the 347th FG during World War 2.

On 14 August Maj Davis flew his 35th combat mission as flight leader in a 12-aircraft Mustang formation that was making a low-level napalm run against supply warehouses in the heavily defended North Korean capital, Pyongyang. It was his second trip of the day over the city, as several hours earlier he had led one of the most famous napalm attacks of the war on the heavily industrial area of Pyongyang. During the first mission, whilst at the controls of F-51D 44-74597 *SEXY SALLY II*, he and his wingman had released their ordnance while flying between tall smokestacks. Moments later Davis's aircraft had hit a cable aimed at protecting key industrial sites from attack, sustaining serious damage. Having nursed the F-51 back to base, Davis switched to another bombed-up Mustang and headed back to the North Korean capital a few hours later. The events of this mission were subsequently recounted in the citation that accompanied the Silver Star posthumously awarded to him;

'Maj Davis led a flight of 12 F-51 type aircraft on a mission over Korea. He displayed outstanding airmanship and exceptional heroism by leading his squadron over the heavily defended city of Pyongyang, where a devastating low-level napalm attack was made against supply warehouses in that city. Two of his pilots [Capts John Horn and John Grossman] were shot down by enemy fire and his own aircraft was heavily damaged. Despite the intensity of enemy opposition, Maj Davis pulled away from his squadron and circled the target area, repeatedly attempting to locate the downed pilots. After an exhaustive search, he reassembled his squadron over the designated rendezvous point and led them in the direction of home. Approximately ten minutes after leaving the target area, his aircraft engine failed. Maj Davis jettisoned his canopy, after which his aircraft was seen to enter a spiral to the left, before crashing into the ground and exploding.'

1Lt Walter Burke of the 67th FBS was also involved in the Pyongyang missions on 14 August. Indeed, he found himself leading the 67th FBS in a 60-aircraft Mustang formation tasked with performing a low-level attack as part of the combined FEAF assault on the North Korean capital. The weather was unusually bad that day, and Burke led his formation, following a precise timetable, to the target area to which they were assigned. As they approached Pyonyang they were subjected to intense and accurate AAA, which persisted all the way to and through the attack route.

The close proximity of hospitals and a prisoner-of-war compound to the assigned target areas complicated the navigation, requiring precise pinpointing by 1Lt Burke. The attack was carried out at treetop level through a constant barrage of flak. Burke led his flight in, the four-ship of F-51s setting a series of warehouses on fire with napalm canisters that resulted in thick columns of black smoke rising from the target area. These acted as markers for the remaining three flights from the 67th, and the Mustang pilots put their bombs directly on target. In the post-mission debriefing the 67th claimed ten warehouse buildings destroyed and a AAA battery knocked out.

The attacks against myriad targets in Pyongyang on 14 August were all led by Mustangs from the 18th FBG, which always came in at low level. No fewer than five F-51s were lost on this date and four pilots killed – the fifth was rescued.

Having survived the Pyongyang mission, 1Lt Burke came close to being shot down a few days later whilst attacking troop concentrations near Numchonjon. Just as he released his bomb load he felt a huge impact as his fighter was caught in withering 40 mm AAA. Hit by one of the shells,

This dramatic photograph was taken at low level over Pyongyang just after Maj Murrit Davis, CO of the 39th FIS, flying F-51D-30 44-74597 *Sexy Sally II*, released his napalm tanks during a mission on the afternoon of 14 August 1951. The F-51 in the background was flown by Capt Al Wagner. A similar mission was flown to the same target – supply warehouses – several hours later, resulting in the deaths of Maj Davis and Capts John Grossman and John Horn, all of whom hailed from the 39th FIS (*Al Wagner*)

Photographed at Seoul City AB in late 1951, F-51D-25 44-73073 *LiZ PIUS 3* of the 12th FBS taxies out at the start of its next mission armed with napalm canisters (note how badly dented the canister beneath the left wing is) and 5-in rockets. Hit by ground fire on a number of occasions, the aircraft was finally lost to enemy action on 20 February 1952. By then it was serving with No 2 Sqn SAAF (*USAF*)

the Mustang 'lurched violently and trembled all over', Burke recalled. 'I glanced over to my left wing and there was a big crater in the middle, right next to the ammunition bays that were feeding the machine guns. It caused that wing to be way out of line, and it was a lot of trouble to nurse the aircraft back to base. It's a wonder that the 40 mm shell didn't tear the wing off.'

One of the most experienced pilots in the 18th FBG at this time was Capt Jim Byers of the 12th FBS, who had already logged plenty of time in World War 2 (flying P-38s with the 474th FG in the European Theatre of Operations). On one particularly memorable mission from Seoul on 13 September 1951, he was flying as wingman for the formation leader when the latter suffered a problem with his Mustang and had to return to base. This left Byers in charge of aircraft from both the 12th FBS and the 39th FIS;

'We went inland to Sinanju and dive-bombed a bridge just south of the town. It was a short span that crossed a small stream. We never drew any AAA at all, and hit the bridge with two bombs and put it out of commission. I called the rest of the 12th FBS flight and told them that we had hit the bridge, and they acknowledged that they would go north and hit one of the smaller bridges, while the 39th FIS would take on a third bridge. My lead flight then started reconnoitring the roads on the way home to see if we could find some enemy equipment on the move. We eventually heard that the remaining 12th FBS pilots had finished bombing and would join up with the 39th FIS flight.

'Remember, we were north of Pyongyang, which put us in the middle of MiG-15 country, and we had no escort looking out for us at a higher altitude. The last flight in the 39th FIS had just started heading south when it was jumped by four MiG-15s. Lt Wally Parks was leading the formation, and he turned into the enemy jets, fired a few rounds and then called for help. My flight of three Mustangs responded, and we soon saw Parks's flight heading south, but there were only three of them – by then the four MiGs had left. The three remaining Mustang pilots had fought them down low and scored some hits, but 1Lt William Jackman

in the No 4 slot had tried to outrun the MiGs. An enemy jet had quickly run right up his tail and hit him with a burst of 37 mm fire, causing the Mustang to disintegrate near Samdan-dong. If Jackman had stayed low and violently manoeuvred like his squadronmates he could have escaped. This was probably the first time that any of our aircraft had been shot down from the rear in such dramatic fashion.

'The strip at Seoul was only 3000 ft long and the PSP was all broken up, making the runway and taxiways even rougher that the Korean roads. One September morning we got the call to go and help some Marines who wanted a series of troublesome gun emplacements removed. The mission would take us all the way across the peninsula. We took off to the east, climbed over Seoul and levelled off at 7000 ft, at which point we set our course. At this time of year, during the monsoon season, the entire countryside was emerald green and very beautiful from the air.

'We passed over the strip known as K-47, crossed the Hwachon Reservoir and turned north toward the "Punch Bowl". Our flight leader called "Devastate Baker", the Marine command post, and they told him to contact "Devastate Mosquito", as he would be the one to mark the target for us with a smoke rocket. Capt Cohn gave the T-6 "Mosquito" pilot a call and got his exact position. As soon as we had him in sight the "Mosquito" led us north of the "Punch Bowl" to where the mountains got really rugged. The pilot told us that the enemy's guns were down at the bottom of the canyon, and then said he was going to mark them if we were ready. Capt Cohn said we were ready. By then one of the Mustang pilots (No 3) stated that his engine was rough and he was going to return to base, leaving No 4 to stay with us for the strafing pass.

'The "Mosquito" marked the target and we dived in and laid our napalm right on the guns. The "Mosquito" observer went wild and stated, "That's the stuff, that's right on them." Several of the enemy troops were trying to run up the hill, and we unleashed rockets and ammo, taking most of them out. Once we were out of ordnance we pulled up out of the valley and started to head home. The "Mosquito" leader gave Capt Cohn a call and said, "'Grenadier Leader', that was mighty fine coverage. I'll give you 100 per cent coverage with your ordnance."'

Capts Venaman and MacCamish of the 67th FBS prepare to fly an interdiction mission from Hoengsong AB on 25 December 1951, with a traditional Christmas greeting on the napalm canister and candy cane striping on one of the 5-in rockets. Note that Capt MacCamish has a bandoleer of bullets for his side arm over his right shoulder (*Robert Noland*)

OPERATIONS FROM HOENGSONG

On 1 October 1951 the 18th FBG moved from Seoul City AB to Hoengsong AB (K-46), in the centre of the Korean Peninsula, because it was appreciably closer to the Manchurian border. This meant that the group's trio of Mustang squadrons could attack a wider range of targets. The move coincided with the beginning of the monsoon season, and the weather was soon getting crisp and cool as the countryside turned from bright greens to an ugly brown.

During October 1951 the weather was ideal for flying, and in some flights every member logged at least 45 missions. The ground forces were carrying out limited offensives to improve their positions before the harsh winter weather set in, and Chinese troops were doing the same thing. Although the number of CAS missions flown by the 18th FBG almost doubled during this period, the group still had to target the railway and bridge network. Many of the pilots were flying two missions a day, and according to the 18th FBG's own newspaper some were completing five CAS flights per day. However, from November 1951 through to February 1952 there were many days of 'zero-zero' temperature when the F-51s did not fly.

Capt Jim Byers described how difficult it was for the Mustang pilots to keep all the railways and bridges out of commission;

'We seemed to have all of these items taken away from the enemy, and within a couple of days they were up and working again. The figures that came up from our intelligence corps stated that, in some areas, the North Korean labourers numbered 250,000 in a 75-mile stretch of land, which indicated why they were so adept at repairing the damage. Many of the villages near the railway system were levelled by night-flying B-26 Invaders because the workforce was being housed there.

'On one morning in October we were very lucky. We had a mission to bust rails just south of Kuni-Ri, and I was flying the group lead. We passed over Chunchon [K-47], which was where the "Mosquitos" were based, then over Pyongyang, and hit the Imjin River at Ich-on. We then flew up the Imjin to the target area, and I took the 12th FBS flights in first. We were very surprised to see many railcars on a siding, and decided to take them out. After the first couple of bombs went off, we began to observe secondary explosions among the railcars.

'Despite the Chinese defending the area with 20 mm and 40 mm guns, we experienced very little in the way of AAA on this occasion. After I saw the secondary explosions I called pilots from No 2 Sqn SAAF and the 67th FBS on the radio and told them to hit the same area we had just finished with, and to forget what they had earlier been assigned. Right after the call-out to the other units I saw Capt Cohn lead his flight down in a dive. As he started to climb away from the target he was hit by AAA and flipped over in the air, from right to left. He was only about 100 ft above the ground, and I figured he was going in. However, he somehow righted the Mustang and started climbing out for home. The rest of his flight stayed with him and looked him over. Cohn had been lucky, and also very much on the ball! We left with the entire siding of railcars burning. Evidently they had been carrying a lot of ammo to support some type of offensive.'

Like Capt Byers, Maj Julian F Crow, who joined the 12th FBS as its Executive Officer shortly after the 18th's move to Hoengsong, was a World War 2 veteran. Having seen combat in P-40s and P-38s, he was a talented fighter pilot who knew

This 12th FBS F-51D was hit by AAA over the target and suffered significant damage during a mission in early 1952. Its pilot managed to fly back to Hoengsong, where, just as he was about to land, he hit an army truck that was travelling along a taxiway. Most battle-damaged Mustangs made it back to base, where their pilots often chose to make wheels-up crash-landings on smooth ground (*James Hambrick*)

F-51D *Napalm-Nan* was flown from Chinhae by the 39th FIS in the autumn and winter of 1951. Ironically, in light of its nickname, the fighter-bomber has been armed with two 500-lb GP bombs and four 5-in rockets, rather than napalm (*James Harris*)

how to handle the F-51D. Capt Byers recalled flying with him on Crow's first mission of the Korean War;

'He was flying in my No 2 slot. The target was a supply cache in a village just north of Chorwon. We were loaded with napalm and 5-in rockets, and we used them to the best advantage over the target. We had to dive down through a hole in the clouds to get at the target, and on the ridges were several automatic weapons popping away at us on every dive-bombing run. After we had all of the target area burning we came back around to start getting even with some of the gunners, and we took out several of them.'

Having hit the dams in June in an effort to help kick start peace talks between the opposing sides, the 18th FBG found itself in the hot seat once again in the autumn of 1951 in the run up to renewed discussions at Panmunjom. When a date for the negotiations was set, Gen Matthew Ridgway (who had replaced Gen MacArthur as commander of UN forces in Korea in April 1951) sent a letter to the group stating that he wanted a 110 per cent effort throughout the period of the talks so as to keep the pressure on the communists.

At that time the 18th was flying mostly interdiction missions against the seven main supply routes from the north all the way down to the frontlines. When the enemy began shifting its supply lines to the secondary roads, the game plan added those routes to the hit list as well. This also forced the communists to cut back on truck traffic and use the rail system more. Thus, the attacks became centred on railway cuttings and the trains themselves. The work of supporting the troops was not overlooked, however, with CAS missions being flown as required. All of these requests had the 18th FBG flying 90+ missions per day, and many extended all the way to the main road and railway junctions just south of the Yalu.

Col William McBride, who had left the 18th FBG to become the Fifth Air Force's director of combat operations after being wounded in action, told his pilots, 'We have decided to destroy the enemy's rail system to where it is no longer a factor. The "truck busting" at night will be turned over to both B-26 Invader groups.'

Although Col McBride was no longer required to fly in combat following his posting to the Fifth Air Force HQ, he routinely sortied with the 39th FIS. On one of its missions in support of the peace talks McBride was set to lead the 18th FBG on a big strike. Indeed, the entire group was lined up on the runway at Hoengsong, with the Mustangs carrying a mixed load of ordnance – some carried napalm, others 500-lb GP or 250-lb fragmentation bombs or six rockets. All of them had a full load of 0.50-cal ammunition.

There was a long line of F-51s ready for takeoff, and 1Lt Howard B Arnold was McBride's No 2, flying off his wing. As the 'biscuit guns' flashed a green light from the tower, the throttles were pushed to the firewalls for takeoff and the aircraft built up speed. At the point of no return the engine in 1Lt Arnold's Mustang lost power and he could not lift off, causing the aircraft to crash off the end of the runway with a full load of napalm and munitions onboard. A huge cloud of black smoke and flames erupted from the crash site, and the watching pilots held their breath, believing that one of their number had been lost. However, Arnold, unsure whether he was going to get airborne in his combat-weary F-51, had thrown back the canopy as he commenced his takeoff run and was therefore able to abandon his Mustang just before it was engulfed in flames.

Despite continuing to suffer heavy attrition (24 F-51s were lost to all causes in Korea between 1 August and 30 September) due primarily to communist AAA, the 18th FBG maintained its high sortie tempo. The 'Flying Tigers' of the 12th FBS notched up their 10,000th sortie in early October when 2Lt Alvin O Wyatt taxied in at Hoengsong. He shared the $50.00 prize money for completing this mission with his crew chief, SSgt Gressley. Capt Ellis L Fisher flew the 67th FBS's 8000th sortie that same day. Finally, the 39th FIS logged its 10,000th sortie on 8 October, this sortie being flown by 1Lt Beacher Tillman. A significant number of the 39th's missions had been flown whilst the unit was serving alongside the 40th FIS as part of the 35th FBG.

The 39th continued to lead from the front for the rest of the month, junior pilots such as 1Lt Carl J Wood flying their fair share of the missions.

Between 25 May 1951 and 31 May 1952, the 39th FIS was assigned to the 18th FBG. Amongst the Mustangs flown by the squadron during this period was F-51D-25 44-73888, which had previously served with the 8th FBG's 35th FBS. It was photographed in early 1952 carrying drop tanks that had been converted into cargo pods. Subsequently passed on to the 67th FBS, the aeroplane was one of two F-51s from the squadron that were lost over the target area on 27 April 1952 – eyewitness reports stated that the aeroplane exploded in mid air after being hit by AAA. Its pilot, 1Lt William Sankey, perished, as did his squadronmate 1Lt Joel Rives in the second downed Mustang (F-51D-25 44-73875) (*Glen Wold*)

During a typical sortie in mid October, Wood led a four-aircraft F-51 flight to the target area near Hadong-ni. The mission had commenced in marginal weather, which got progressively worse the further north the Mustang pilots went. Wood's navigational skills saw the aircraft safely through hazardous mountain terrain on the way to Hadong-ni, and as they approached the target he advised his flight to remain in a neutral area while he made a lone reconnaissance to check out the local weather conditions. While there, and without the support of his flight, he made a series of destructive passes using his napalm, rockets and 0.50-cal fire on enemy supply dumps, bunkers and troops.

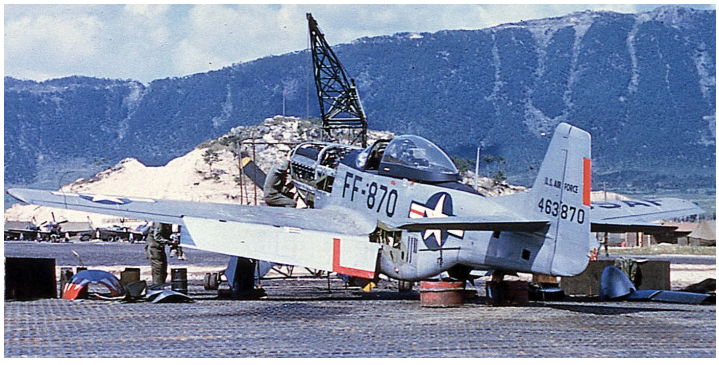
Wood then returned to the area where his flight was orbiting and led them to the target, where he made further attacks on the same positions. Despite intense automatic weapons fire and adverse weather conditions, Wood continued to make strafing runs on the targets until all the F-51s had expended their ordnance and optimum results had been obtained. He then reassembled the Mustangs and led them through instrument flight conditions back to Hoengsong. The 'Mosquito' controller in the target area confirmed a 90 per cent effectiveness with ordnance, and also stated that at least 50 enemy troops had been killed. As a result of Wood's leadership and airmanship, the enemy were denied vital supplies and troops, which greatly reduced their ability to wage offensive warfare in that sector. This mission was Wood's 72nd combat sortie, and he received a DFC for it.

The 18th FBG flew throughout the winter months of 1951-52, except when the snow was so thick that it concealed ground targets – this had been the case in 1950-51 as well. Capt Robert A Nolan of the 67th FBS related a combat experience that conveys some of the flavour of the day-to-day routine during this bleak period;

'One cold day my flight was assigned to duty as ResCAP [Rescue Combat Air Patrol] alert in support of a large formation attacking a target in the vicinity of Hamhung, on the east coast of North Korea. During the afternoon we received word that one of our aircraft was down. Our ResCAP team took off, and the standard procedure was for us to ride cover for the downed pilot, which required us to have external tanks on to give us plenty of loiter time. As soon as we arrived over the area the four-ship that had been covering the downed pilot headed back to K-46 while we looked for targets. Far down the mountain there were plenty of enemy troops hunting for him.

'As soon as we were in position, the [US] Navy announced it had launched a helicopter right offshore, and it was on its way. At the same time we got word that MiG-15s were taking off a few miles to the north. The weather was unfavourable and deteriorating, and daylight was fading fast. It was clear that the operation had to proceed as swiftly as possible if we hoped to be successful. Since the downed pilot looked to be in immediate danger, I decided to intercept the helicopter to provide cover and

Mustangs (with F-51D-25 44-84650 *WHITEY* in the foreground) of the 67th FBS sit out a snowstorm at Hoengsong in early January 1952. Several have already been loaded in readiness for a mission later in the morning. On 8 January a fresh snowstorm limited the total number of sorties flown to just 50, allowing communist forces to bring in troops and supplies without fear of attack from the air (*Elmer Dunlap*)



Taken at Chinhae, this photograph clearly shows the range of hills that surrounded the airfield – the main headquarters for the 18th FBG in South Korea, the group using Hoengsong as its forward operating base at this time. Typically, the unit's Mustangs set off from Chinhae, dropped their bombs, refuelled and rearmed at Hoengsong, flew another mission and then recovered to Chinhae. 12th FBS F-51D-20 44-63870, seen here with its propeller removed so that groundcrews could access its coolant header tanks, was hit by ground fire and crashed into the crest of a ridge in North Korea on 31 January 1952. Its pilot, Capt Tedrick Irwin, was posted Missing in Action (*Max Tomich*)

lead him to the target. Within minutes, the controller stated that, due to the weather getting worse, the helicopter had been ordered to return to the carrier. As we turned back to resume station over our downed pilot, out biggest worry was how he would survive the bitterly cold night, because there was nothing we could do for him right now.

'Usually, on combat missions during the winter months, I carried an Air Force issue parka under the seat. I knew it would help me out if I went down. I knew if I could get it to him it would help him survive the cold. I told the other members of my flight to maintain altitude while I descended down to treetop level. When I arrived at the optimum point I threw the parka out and then headed back to K-46. The next day word got around that the downed pilot [Capt Fred Wade of the 39th FIS] had been recovered and was now safe in friendly hands.

'A few days later Capt Wade returned to K-46, and I went over to the 39th HQ to congratulate him on his escape. As we chatted, I asked if he had got the parka we dropped, and if had been helpful. He told me that when I approached his position at low altitude and airspeed he didn't understand what I was up to. Then when the parka fell away from my Mustang he thought I had bailed out! By that time it was too dark to locate it, but he did recover it the next morning. He returned it to me, along with a big thank you for the efforts. Over the intervening years I have occasionally worn it, and when I do I am reminded of that long wintry afternoon all over again.'

VETERANS AND NOVICES

By mid February 1952 the sheer volume of missions flown by the 18th FBG meant that 13 pilots from the group had completed their 100 missions and were now ready to be sent home. Their number would continue to grow as most pilots were flying two sorties per day if the weather conditions remained relatively benign.

The group was now receiving replacement pilots from the USA that had been exclusively trained on the F-51, rather than jets. Amongst this crop of combat novices was 2Lt William T 'Tim' Urquhart, who soon proved his mettle over North Korea. Posted to the 'Red Scarves' of the 67th FBS, he arrived in Korea with a total of 349 hours in the Mustang;

'I was assigned to "H" Flight and we flew most of our missions from the forward base at K-46. There, the living conditions were rather primitive,

and it is hard to describe the oppressive heat in our tent in summer and the penetrating cold in winter. Our tents were heated by diesel oil, with storage barrels and a copper line to the stove. It was extremely hard to wake up after an almost sleepless night and fly a couple of missions during the day.

'On one mission I was struck in the windscreen by ground fire. We were attacking trenches with napalm, flying four abreast, and approaching the target I noticed a flash of fire to my right. It was my element leader's Mustang exploding. At the drop point I took a 0.30-cal bullet hit from straight ahead. It grooved the cowling for about three feet and broke the windscreen to the right of the armoured glass. I had my goggles up and was scratched near the right eye. What really worried me was where else had I been hit? The F-51 was a plumber's nightmare of coolant pipes, and a hole in any of them would be fatal to the Merlin engine. Strict discipline forced us to stay in the area to fly cover for the downed pilot. Needless to say I was very anxious to get back to K-46 in case there were other problems with my aircraft.

'A few days later, while approaching the K-46 pattern, I heard a feeble "Mayday" call. Pulling up to higher altitude, I was able to hear the transmission better and relayed a steer to the distressed aircraft. The DF [direction finding] station sent headings till a T-6 "Mosquito" was in sight of the downed Mustang. It was the aircraft of 2Lt David L Gray, who had struck a power cable, breaking the windscreen and shearing off the VHF radio antenna, the vertical stabiliser and most of the rudder. He had done a great job of landing the fighter safely with almost no rudder control.

'Gray was an outstanding pilot, and a short time later he experienced a rough-running engine outbound on a combat mission. He bellied the Mustang in at an emergency strip with very little damage. He was not done with belly landing F-51s just yet, however. A few missions later Gray fired his rockets at a target and the electrical "pigtail" connecting the rocket motor to the pylon became lodged between the aileron and the wing. This jammed the ailerons in almost full lock. Upon returning to K-46, Gray made a great wheels-up landing. Before he made the attempt Gray explained his situation to the wing CO over the radio as he wanted to make sure that he would not be blamed for the mishap. This was important to 2Lt Gray because he had already endured two forced landings, neither of which had been his fault.'

Although 2Lt Gray had been particularly unlucky to suffer so many mishaps, the 18th FBG's attrition rate remained alarmingly high into 1952. Indeed, with the number of Mustangs that were being lost on missions seemingly increasing on a near-daily basis, pilots were now routinely flying ResCAP missions for downed aviators or being sent to look for aircraft that had not returned to base. 2Lt Tim Urquhart of the 67th FBS recalled that he was on another mission when the 18th FBG radioed for his flight to search for a South African pilot who had aborted the mission between taking off and the target area;

'I was flying slightly above and to the right of my flight lead at low level as we looked for the missing Mustang. It was my job to keep him in sight and scan everything to my left. Out of the corner of my eye a large power cable suddenly appeared straight ahead of me. I was lucky enough to hit it with my propeller, which cut through the cable and threw it over my left wing and down into my right wing. The cable bent the right wing

leading edge into the 0.50-cal gun barrels and creased the upper wing skin. Immediately after hitting the cable I was climbing out when the engine quit cold at about 200 ft! When the Merlin stopped, our only emergency procedure was to throttle back, switch fuel tanks, check boost pumps and then advance the throttles. Hearing that engine respond to this was like music made in heaven! What had happened was a horrible coincidence of me draining a fuel tank right after hitting that cable. Anyway, we finished the mission successfully and returned to K-46.'

OPERATION *STRANGLE*

Inspired by a similarly named operation in Italy during World War 2, Operation *Strangle* was devised by Fifth Air Force Vice Commander, Brig Gen E J Timberlake, in May 1951 to interdict enemy road and rail traffic before it could re-supply the frontlines. Eight north-south routes were identified, between 20 and 80 miles north of the foremost troops. There was some overlap, but generally Fifth Air Force (including aircraft from US Navy and UN aircraft carriers sailing in the Yellow Sea) was responsible for the three western routes, naval aircraft from Task Force 77 targeted the two central routes from carriers normally deployed in the Sea of Japan, while the mainly shore-based aircraft of the US Marine Corps took care of the three easternmost routes.

Originally planned to last 45 days, *Strangle* was extended continuously as it tried to meet its objectives. By December 1951 the Fifth Air Force had concluded that *Strangle* was not working, but, in the absence of an acceptable alternative, Gen Matthew Ridgway insisted that it continue.

Strangle had received little media coverage in 1951 because of its lack of success. However, this changed after the FEAF launched the operation with renewed vigour in early 1952, resulting in significant damage being inflicted on communist re-supply routes. The first morning of the operation saw Mustangs from the 18th FBG put everything they had into the attacks by hitting all of the enemy's ammunition dumps northwest of Chorwon – a main supply point for the Chinese in their effort to mount an offensive. This raid was followed up in the afternoon by napalm-loaded Mustangs hitting troop concentrations and gun positions.

The next day, however, the weather was so bad that none of the flight operations planned were able to launch. Conditions improved significantly on Day Three, allowing the Mustangs to work over targets behind enemy lines – five supply shelters, four large troop shelters and 21 buildings were destroyed and a major tunnel entrance was blocked. A handful of F-51s that still had ordnance after these attacks teamed up with US Marine Corps Corsair units to destroy five mortars, 13 troop revetments and two AAA

Wearing squadron colours and posing by the 12th FBS billboard at Hoengsong, these pilots were part of the unit's 'Jig Flight'. They were photographed in the spring of 1952, when the 18th FBG's Mustang squadrons were putting in a big effort to target communist road traffic and stores depots in order to prevent the launching of a spring offensive by the PVA. Although the enemy did indeed instigate its campaign, the Mustang pilots helped blunt their advance southward (*Stuart Gregory*)

Col William H Clark, left, poses with senior personnel from the 18th FBG alongside his Mustang (F-51D-30 44-74651), which was adorned with the badges of No 2 Sqn SAAF, the 12th and 67th FBS and the 39th FIS on the port side of the fuselage, and the 18th FBG on both sides. The fighter also had diagonal command stripes on its rear fuselage. Clark was CO of the 18th FBG from 7 March 1952 through to 1 January 1953 (*San Forbert*)

batteries. Having delivered all their napalm and rockets, the F-51 pilots liberally strafed frontline positions, killing a large number of troops.

Strangle continued to gather pace on Day Four, with Mustang pilots attacking and strafing targets northeast of Kaesong and all the way to the east coast of Korea. In between these two locations they were able to use napalm to wipe out 16 troop revetments and several artillery pieces, killing a number of soldiers in the process. Strike orders came in so fast during the course of the day that flightline personnel had trouble getting as many Mustangs mission ready as was requested. Later that evening pilots came across two main supply dumps right behind the frontline and destroyed them both. Again, a large number of communist troops were killed trying to defend these key sites.

That same day Mustangs from No 2 Sqn SAAF had started targeting railway routes heading south out of Manchuria, and by the time they began to return to K-46 they had taken out 15 sections of track, most of which were in areas where the enemy would find it difficult to make repairs. The MiG-15s were kept at bay throughout this period by high-flying F-86 Sabres, much to the Mustang pilots' relief.

Throughout *Strangle* the 18th FBG was able to concentrate on flying rail interdiction missions over a general area. One such operation saw F-51Ds venturing into the northwest Korean railway line districts, which had been left alone by UN air strikes for several weeks. Mustangs surprised the enemy with a large number of 500-lb GP bombs and high explosive 5-in rockets. During that time the group achieved 29 rail cuts, although the exact amount of damage caused by the Mustang pilots was never precisely known because many of the bombs were fitted with delayed

On 11 July 1952 the 18th FBW reached another milestone when the wing completed its 45,000th sortie. On the left of this photograph is Capt Elliot D Ayer of the 67th FBS, who undertook the historic sortie. To the right is group CO Col William Clark. Exactly two weeks after this photograph was taken Capt Ayer was posted Missing in Action on his 84th mission, his F-51D-30 (44-74655) being brought down by ground fire near Sarryong-ni (*Sam Forbert*)

fusing. This meant that the F-51s had often left the area before much of the ordnance dropped went off.

All along its coastal patrol route the 18th went after anything that could float, including several large sampans that were heavily damaged – one actually sank. All of these were transporting ammunition. With the arrival of warmer weather, pilots were now flying from very early pre-dawn until last light, when the night intruders took over.

Coinciding with the onset of spring, Col William H Clark took over command of the 18th FBG in March 1952, replacing Col Ernest G Ford. Nothing changed in the way of operations, however, with all four squadrons being kept incredibly busy as their workload never diminished. In the late spring of 1952 the dangerous missions being flown were getting so repetitious that decades later many of the pilots involved struggled to remember specific details, except when their aircraft was hit by ground fire. During a two-week period in May the 18th FBG's F-51s logged more than 44 railway cuts, 39 bunkers destroyed, 14 road cuts and numerous bridges, tunnels and railcars destroyed. The complete listing of enemy troops killed in action could be substantially confirmed.

Not long after Col Clark took command the 18th FBG logged its 45,000th combat sortie. Amongst the pilots contributing to this tally was Capt Ted Hanna, a pilot in the 67th FBS. He recalled some of the standout missions he flew during the summer of 1952;

'We were in a group gaggle to bomb a mining area northeast of Sinanju. Twenty of our Mustangs were loaded with two 500-lb GP bombs each and a full load of 0.50-cal ammunition. We were flying at 10,000 ft, and our MiGCAP [F-86Es of the 51st FIW] was above us at 20,000 ft. Just as soon as we passed over Sinanju a radio message was received stating, "The trains are leaving the station", which meant the MiGs were airborne and headed south. At that point the F-86s dropped their external tanks, which fell right through our formation. The MiGs came in below us and shot straight up through our formation, firing all the way. At this point we all got in trail, made our bomb runs and then proceeded to form up for the flight home.

'Just as we were forming up, one of our pilots took a hit from a MiG and had to bail out – he was taken prisoner. Fifth Air Force HQ subsequently "got bent out of shape" because we had lost a pilot, even with F-86 top cover. The F-86 people said we were off course, but when we told them that their gas tanks fell through our formation they were embarrassed.

'Fifth Air Force then sent down a colonel from an F-84 wing to teach us how to attack targets on the ground, and his visit went down like a lead balloon. Although he had flown the Mustang in World War 2, on his first mission with us he forgot to burn down his fuselage tank before making his bomb run. You can guess what happened next. As he pulled up from making his bomb run the aircraft snapped twice and he augered straight in. Needless to say, Fifth Air Force left us alone from then on.'

F-51D *Pappy son* was the battle-weary personal mount of Capt Elmer Duff of the 67th FBS. It was photographed at Chinhae between missions in the autumn of 1952, the fighter being armed and ready for its next flight. The 67th FBS was heavily involved in the blunting of a major Chinese offensive in November 1952, with Duff and *Pappy Son* flying myriad sorties at this time (*Elmer Duff*)

Strangle continued well into the summer, with UN fighter-bombers reducing the main lines from Sinuiju to Sinanju to 70 per cent single track, and from Sinanju to Pyongyang to 90 per cent. Aside from the F-51s committed to the campaign, Fifth Air Force's F-80s and F-84s were helping to destroy the North Korean railway network faster than it could be rebuilt, even though the enemy had more than 100,000 labourers located at the major rail junctions, ready to jump in and effect repairs at any time. They also had an additional 150,000 men working on the long lines from Manchuria to south of Pyongyang.

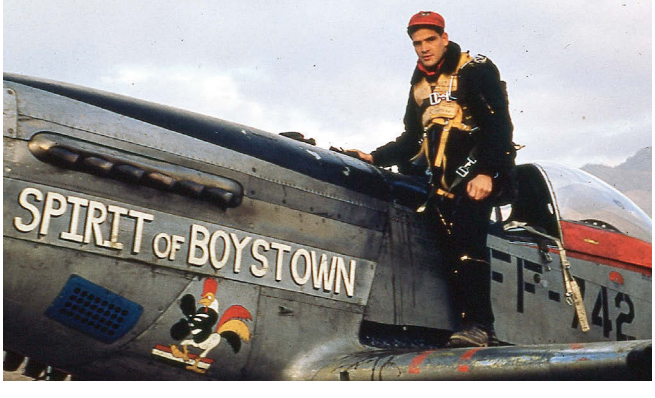
According to 18th FBG records, the last week of August 1952 proved to be a big one for the 12th FBS and No 2 Sqn SAAF. 1Lt Marland Haines led four Mustangs into northwestern Korea, just below the Yalu River, to hit an area that had been missed by previous strikes. The pilots napalmed, fired rockets and strafed until they were out of ordnance. When they left, nine buildings had been destroyed by secondary explosions and another ten had been burnt out. Some of these structures had been used by the Chinese to house hidden caches of weapons and ammunition.

That same day 1Lt Robert Titus (who later led the 10th Air Commando Squadron in Vietnam, flying F-5A Freedom Fighters) of the 39th FBS led another four-aircraft formation on a CAS mission. With very little in the way of anti-aircraft fire opposing the F-51 pilots, they dropped their napalm and fired rockets on 12 buildings, which were burnt to the ground. On their strafing passes they hit a fuel dump that also went up in flames. All four aircraft returned safely to base, with no damage reported.

THE TRUCKBUSTER

The 18th FBG certainly lived up to its 'Truckbuster' nickname during the summer and autumn of 1952, as the group remained firmly committed to Operation *Strangle*. The unit's bimonthly newspaper, *The Truckbuster*, was routinely full of stories documenting the success of the F-51 pilots over North Korea.

One of the leading 'truckbusting' exponents of this period was Maj William 'Willie' Bryan, who had everybody guessing how he had managed to teach his pilots to find and destroy so many enemy vehicles. Willie's 'secret' was simply skilful, daredevil flying at treetop level through the valleys and draws of North Korea, sometimes on wing's edge when there was no other way to get through. At that height it was easier to spot the expertly camouflaged vehicles. He would often tell his men 'Pull in your moustache if you have to', while twirling his own handlebar, 'but get as far down as you can and then look around – you'll probably find a target!' By using this technique, the 18th's Mustangs destroyed a record of 128 enemy vehicles in a single day. According to *The Truckbuster*, Capt Jerry Hogue and his three flight members held the group record by day's end, having



Capt Joe Ortega of the 67th FBS also played his part in the defeat of the communist offensive in November 1952, flying Mustang *SPIRIT of BOYSTOWN*. Adorned with an 18th FBG fighting cock emblem, it was one of the last F-51s to be sent to Korea as an attrition replacement (*Joe Ortega*)

destroyed 32 enemy trucks during a single five-hour mission.

In the late August edition of *The Truckbuster*, the squadrons continued to get plenty of press from Fifth Air Force for their attacks on Chinese troops. The 18th claimed at least 350 communist soldiers killed in a flurry of sorties mounted over a 48-hour period. One of the most successful pilots involved in these missions was flight leader 1Lt H R White, who was quoted as saying, 'We were called in by an airborne controller who had spotted a concentration of enemy troops that had dug in on the top of a ridge. We worked all of our napalm and rockets and then strafed everything that was left with our 0.50-cals. The controller stated that we had excellent coverage, estimating that we had killed about 75 troops.'

When this photograph of 1Lt Charles Riggs and his well used F-51 *My Chickie IV* was taken at Chinhae in late 1952, the 18th FBG was only a few weeks away from retiring the last of its F-51s. Indeed, Riggs's 67th FBS was the last frontline USAF squadron to fly the Mustang in combat in Korea (*Charles Riggs*)

That same edition of the newspaper contained a mention of 1Lt John E Taylor, who had led his flight in an attack on a large number of Chinese troops found occupying a small village near Chorwon. An estimated 50+ enemy soldiers were killed in the attack. Many were cut down as they ran for cover in nearby buildings. Several flights from the 12th and 67th FBSs that were on patrol in the same area were credited with a number of buildings destroyed and the slaughter of pack animals laden down with supplies. Aircraft armed with 500-lb GP bombs cut railway lines, and several tunnels and roads were also damaged. These attacks were made within 25 miles of Chorwon.

During the third week of September the 18th FBG was singled out for praise by FEAF HQ for putting on a major three-squadron attack and getting almost perfect strikes against communist supply centres that accounted for 18 buildings destroyed and another ten damaged. Carrying

Capt Joe Dishongh was assigned this F-51D, and he flew it from Korea back to Japan in January 1953 when the 67th FBS was ordered to transition from the Mustang to the Sabre. The aeroplane was eventually passed on to the RoKAF (*Joe Dishongh*)

All wearing matching flight suits, as well as squadron caps and scarves in squadron colours, pilots from the 67th FBS mill around at Johnson AB after flying in from Osan in January 1953. Within days of this photograph being taken, most of them had started their conversion onto the F-86F Sabre fighter-bomber (*Joe Ortega*)

GP and napalm, the gaggle scored near-perfect hits with all their bombs except one, which hung up for a few seconds and released late. To the pilots' surprise they found freshly constructed buildings with metal roofs where they had expected grass huts for a target. The mission was led by Capt Warren Mills, who stated, 'I could hardly believe my eyes. There were all these buildings, lined up in about five neat rows, just like an airfield. There was freshly dug earth around the area that showed the construction was new. We could not miss!'

Lt Earle Carothers, who led the last flight into the target area, had a good view of the damage inflicted. 'The first couple of flights dropped their GP bombs and the rest of us carried the napalm. There were already a lot of fires going, with huge clouds of reddish smoke billowing out. When we released our loads there was a secondary explosion and the entire target practically disappeared in the smoke!'

At the same time this strike was being carried out, another flight of four Mustangs from the 18th hit shipping along the east coast in what were described in the 30 September edition of *The Truckbuster* as 'sitting duck missions'. Small craft were used for shipping supplies along the estuary of the Taedong River west of Chinnampo. The flight ran into about ten boats that were evidently moving supplies. They destroyed three vessels and heavily damaged five more, the latter failing to disintegrate like the wooden ones. One pilot noted, 'When our bombs hit them, they did not disintegrate like we expected. As I was pulling out of my pass, I saw two sets of bombs and some rockets blast into the middle of the cluster of boats. They were "sitting ducks". They were hardly moving when we started our dives, and our bombs seemed to elevate them into the air when they detonated, but we had no secondary explosions.'

By now the 18th had been reduced to three F-51 squadrons, with the 39th FBS having left in June 1952 when it transferred to Col 'Gabby' Gabreski's newly-formed 51st FIW and re-equipped with brand new F-86Es. Its Mustangs were in turn passed on to the 12th and 67th FBSs and to No 2 Sqn SAAF. In late 1952 the latter unit pulled out to convert to the new F-86F Sabre fighter-bomber. Next to undertake the conversion was the 12th FBS and, finally, in January 1953, the 67th FBS passed its remaining F-51s on to RoKAF units.

CHAPTER FOUR

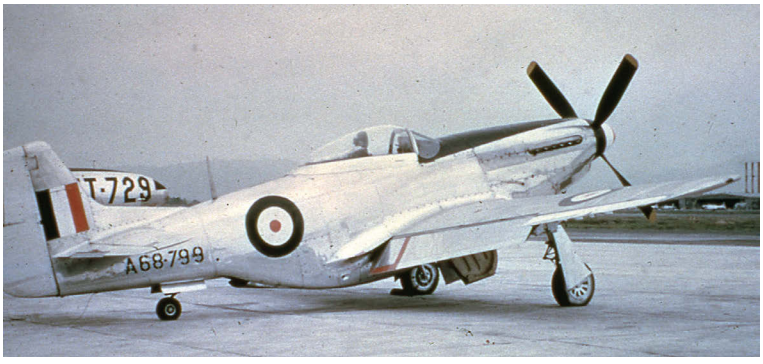
UN MUSTANGS IN COMBAT

As previously noted in this volume, the other nations that operated the Mustang during the Korean War were South Africa, Australia and the Republic of South Korea. When the conflict started in June 1950 the RoKAF had about ten serviceable Mustangs that USAF pilots (under the command of Maj Dean Hess) were using to train local pilots. These F-51Ds were immediately taken over by the 12th FBS, nicknamed the 'Dallas Squadron', as described in chapter one. This meant that it would be a few months before the RoKAF's fleet of Mustangs had increased sufficiently in number to allow it to contribute to the war effort.

By then, the RAAF's No 77 Sqn had become the first non-USAF user of the Mustang to be committed to the conflict. Flying from Iwakuni AB, in Japan, as part of Australia's contribution to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, the unit had actually commenced combat operations exactly a week after the KPA's invasion of South Korea. The squadron initially flew a handful of missions from Iwakuni, before transferring to Taegu in order to be closer to the action. No 77 Sqn would subsequently move on a frequent basis, flying from Pohang, Hamhung (in North Korea), Pusan and, finally, Kimpo.

Word had first reached the squadron on 30 June that the Australian government had agreed to Gen Douglas MacArthur's request that it be sent to Korea, for at that time it was the only unit based in Japan that had a full inventory of Mustangs. No 77 Sqn was on the cusp of returning to Australia when war broke out, its armourers having already

F-51 Mustangs of No 2 Sqn SAAF have their engines run up before taking off en masse from Iwakuni and heading to Pusan East AB on 16 November 1950. A second group of SAAF fighters would head to Korea later that same day, the pilots of those aircraft having gathered in the foreground to send their squadronmates on their way. Once in-theatre No 2 Sqn was controlled by the 6002nd Tactical Support Wing of the FEAF (*SAAF*)



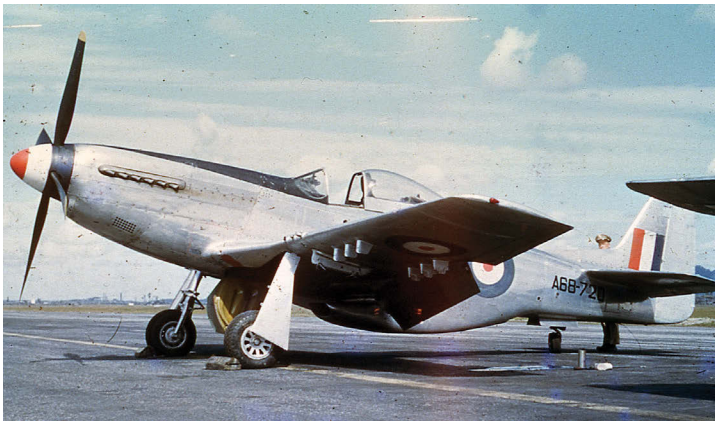
The RAAF's No 77 Sqn was the first non-USAF operator of the Mustang to be committed to the conflict in Korea, the unit receiving orders to join the fight on 30 June 1950. One of the fighters initially sent into action from Iwakuni AB, in Japan, was A68-799 (formerly F-51D-25 44-84815), which is seen here looking resplendent on the eve of war. The aeroplane was subsequently damaged by ground fire and force-landed at Kimpo, although it was repaired and later sold to the RoKAF in November 1953 (*USAF*)

left for home when orders were received at Iwakuni instructing the unit to prepare for combat. This meant that the pilots would have to arm their own Mustangs, their barrels being given a pull-through once the magazines had been loaded. All moveable parts in the Browning guns were also oiled and inspected.

Pilots found that some Mustangs needed their guns and gunsights harmonised. This was achieved by raising the tail of the aircraft until it was in flying attitude and then fitting special mirrors to allow the pilot to look down the gun barrels. He could then align the weapons on a spot about 300 yards distant. The gunsight was then also aligned. Once this procedure had been carried out, all rounds were expected to fire through the gunsight's aiming point (plus or minus a foot or two).

By 2 July No 77 Sqn was ready to fly its first mission from Iwakuni, the weather having scrubbed the unit's operational debut 24 hours earlier. Its first mission was to escort C-47 Skytrains evacuating the wounded from Korea to hospitals in Japan. RAAF Mustangs then escorted B-26 Invaders of the 3rd BW, followed by another escort mission for B-29 formations targeting Yonpo AB, in North Korea. Missions against KPAF airfields were critically important at this early stage of the war and the communists still had plenty of Yak-9s and Il-10s at their disposal. No 77 Sqn's next mission involved the escorting of 17 Invaders over the town of Tongnae and from there to their target north of Seoul, where the bombers knocked out railway bridges spanning the Han River.

The B-29 attack on Yonpo AB was very successful, with one of the No 77 Sqn pilots stating that he was impressed with how they had all carpet-bombed inside the airfield boundaries. He had never worked with large bombers before, and he noted that they all maintained a tight formation despite receiving heavy flak from the defending AAA batteries. This mission showed that the Mustang was a necessary adjunct in bombing raids



A68-720 (F-51D-25 44-84482) was also photographed at Iwakuni AB immediately prior to the KPA invasion of South Korea. Once the war started No 77 Sqn continued to be headquartered at Iwakuni due to a shortage of airfields on the Korean Peninsula, the RAAF pilots being forced to fly 125 miles across the Sea of Japan to reach their targets. A few weeks into the conflict the unit sent a wire home calling for volunteers to replace pilots killed or wounded in action. Twelve aviators responded. A68-720 also survived the war and was sold to the RoKAF in November 1953 (*Robert Dewald*)

north of the 38th Parallel, fighter pilots having to fly for four-and-a-half hours – their aircraft were equipped with external fuel tanks so as to enable them to cover such a vast distance. Fifth Air Force soon discovered that no contemporary jet (e.g. the F-80C) could have escorted the B-29s all that way to and from the target. Following the Yonpo mission the Australian Mustang pilots realised how vulnerable airfields were to bombing attacks.

On 3 July a friendly fire incident occurred when No 77 Sqn attacked a train full of US Army and Republic of Korea Army troops on the main railway line between Suwon and Pyongtaek, inflicting many casualties – 29 of them fatal. The squadron CO, Wg Cdr Lou Spence, had voiced his concern before the mission that the KPA could not have penetrated so far south, but he was assured by Fifth Air Force HQ that the target was correct. This incident was widely reported in US newspapers, but a public statement by Lt Gen George E Stratemeyer, commanding general of the FEAF, cleared the RAAF of any blame.

The unit suffered its first fatality on 7 July when its deputy commander, Sqn Ldr Graham Strout, was killed during a raid on Samchok. He was also the first Australian, and the first non-American UN serviceman, to die in Korea.

For the next two months, its Mustangs equipped with bombs, rockets and napalm, No 77 Sqn supported UN troops retreating before the seemingly unstoppable North Korean advance. To expedite turnaround times between missions, the Mustangs, which were still based at Iwakuni, often refuelled and rearmed at Taegu, near the Pusan Perimeter, where they supported UN forces in their last-ditch stand on the southern tip of Korea. Ordnance and spare parts for the aircraft were stockpiled at the airfield, having been flown in by the squadron's two Dakotas – the twin-engined transports maintained an air bridge between Iwakuni and Taegu.

As the number of civilians heading south continued to grow ahead of the North Korean advance, three squadrons of Mustangs, including No 77 Sqn, flew in to Taegu on 28 July to try to halt the spread of refugees flooding into the Pusan Perimeter. It was strongly suspected that the KPA had infiltrated the civilian population, and that some of the 'pregnant' women within their ranks were in fact carrying satchels of hand grenades. With the airfield on the verge of being overrun that night, pilots were

The RAAF managed to keep its Mustangs in near-spotless condition during the first weeks of the war whilst still flying from Iwakuni AB, No 77 being able to field 26 aircraft and 25 pilots at the start of the campaign. Heading this line up of aircraft is A68-809 (F-51D-25 45-11474), which was assigned to the squadron CO, Wg Cdr Lou Spence – note his rank pennant just forward of the cockpit and solid red spinner, which also denoted the CO's fighter. Spence was killed in this aircraft on 9 September 1950 when he failed to pull out of a dive during a napalm attack on Angang-ni (*Jerry Dore*)

told to toggle-off their napalm tanks and take off across the grass in order to save themselves and their aircraft. The next morning the masses of refugees surrounding Taegu were warned via public address systems to stop their southbound movement, but this had little effect. RAAF and USAF Mustangs were then called in on strafing passes – a gruesome task that had to be done to hold on to Taegu, for at that point things were desperate.

No 77 Sqn RAAF continued to fly numerous sorties from bases just north of the Pusan Perimeter. July 1950 proved to be one of the unit's hardest months, Flt Lt J I 'Bay' Adams, whose motto was 'go in low and hit them hard' (he was also rated as the best shot in the Fifth Air Force!) flying a mission as part of a flight of four F-51s. He stated that a fast, low-flying aircraft was hard to counter, and its pilot was most likely to succeed and survive. This particular mission entailed a flight of about 60 miles west of the Pusan Perimeter to hit a pocket of KPA troops with 500-lb GP bombs. According to Adams, 'we came in low and out of the sun'. They took small-arms fire but no one was hurt.

The agreed dive-bombing angle for dispensing bombs was 60 degrees, and about 35-40 degrees was used for strafing passes and High Velocity Aircraft Rockets. The pull out altitude from these dives was critical, especially in hilly or poorly mapped terrain. Normally, high-speed and evasive manoeuvring were used when approaching the target if ground fire was expected, and it usually was. Mustang pilots who did this risked passing out, but the gamble was justified because ground attack was the best way to hit a significant number of enemy targets. The communists knew this, and usually provided plenty of opposition.

High-priority targets such as bridges, ammunition dumps and rail traffic were often defended with an excess of anti-aircraft weaponry. Some of the guns fired fixed patterns of shells set to explode as the aircraft flew into them, and some were radar controlled and could track an aircraft and adjust their fire to intercept it (by far the most dangerous). Range varied from weapon to weapon, with some shells set to explode at heights up to 23,000 ft – this creating the flak that many of the pilots often saw exploding around them.

The missions flown by No 77 Sqn soon saw the unit hitting targets north of the 38th Parallel. In late July it was directed to go after armour in and around Hamhung, and the unit inflicted considerable damage on a number of T-34 tanks. This was the start of missions ranging all over North Korea, which gave the Australian pilots plenty of opportunity to attack KPA armour rolling south towards Seoul. They were still flying most of their missions out of Iwakuni, but were using Taegu more and more. This was important as it gave them extra loiter time over the enemy.

A trio of No 77 Sqn Mustangs undergo routine servicing between combat missions at Iwakuni in early July 1950. The unit had flown from this airfield, in the Yamaguchi Prefecture of southern Honshu, since February 1946 as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. Conditions here contrasted markedly with those facing No 77 Sqn at Taegu, near the Pusan Peninsula (*RAAF*)

In the weeks leading up to the Inchon Landing (15 September 1950), No 77 Sqn flew myriad sorties in an effort to cut off the supply route leading to the

frontlines at the Pusan Perimeter. During that brief period its Mustangs tallied 1745 hours during the course of 812 sorties. Pilots destroyed 35 tanks and put another 31 out of combat operations or left them severely damaged. They also destroyed 182 trucks and damaged 30 more. The total for the month included four locomotives and 14 railcars, and the pilots also destroyed 13 ammunition or fuel dumps. Most of these missions were flown out of Iwakuni, with a second round of sorties then being generated from Taegu after the fighters had been refuelled and rearmed, before the F-51s returned to Iwakuni in the evening.

On 3 September a flight of four Mustangs from No 77 Sqn was ordered to escort a similar number of B-29s that were to bomb targets in Pyongyang. The long flight from Iwakuni up to the North Korean capital required drop tanks. The B-29s made their bombing runs at 20,000 ft, and when they turned back for their base the Mustang pilots headed for Taegu. Before they reached home, however, they received an urgent call from an airborne controller, who needed them to attack a target some 18 miles north of the airfield. Squadronmate Lyall Klaffer recalled what happened next;

'Our target was a heavy concentration of troops, and we did draw a lot of ground fire. We made a couple of passes, and one of the pilots [Sgt Bill Harrop] said he was down to about 20 gallons of fuel, so he headed for Taegu but he didn't make it. His engine quit and he landed wheels-up on the banks of the Naktong River. He waved that he was okay and we stayed until a fresh flight arrived to help out, as enemy soldiers were all around. The rescue helicopter came in, but could not get to him because of the enemy fire. We feared the worst, and when that ground was secured months later they found his body in a shallow grave. He had been shot several times.'

This was a common fate for Mustang pilots who went down behind enemy lines and could not be reached by a helicopter.

Six days after Harrop's loss, Wg Cdr Spence was killed when his Mustang failed to pull out of a dive during a napalm attack on Angang-ni, his death being a serious blow to the squadron. The Intelligence Mission Narrative for this event read as follows;

'The section then prepared to make their bombing runs, but due to the very low cloud, visibility was limited. Attacking from 700 ft, No 1 [Spence] was seen to go into an unusually steep dive in view of his height and the fact that napalm attacks have previously been delivered from a shallow dive, levelling out to release over the target. No 4 [A Hankinson] saw the aircraft commence a pull out so sharply as to pull heavy vapour trails from the wingtips, but the aircraft struck the ground in the centre of the town and exploded on impact. The other two aircraft, when they saw that there was no possibility of the pilot having survived, continued the attack on the town and caused fires to start.'

The RAAF despatched World War 2 veteran Wg Cdr Dick Cresswell on his third tour as commanding officer to replace Spence. Cresswell arrived at Iwakuni on 17 September and set about

Lt Gen George E Stratemeyer, Commanding General of the US Far East Air Force, congratulates Wg Cdr Lou Spence of No 77 Sqn after decorating him with the Legion of Merit in Japan in August 1950. He described Spence, a veteran of combat both in North Africa and in the Pacific in World War 2, as 'one of the most capable field commanders I have been associated with' (*Australian War Memorial*)

restoring morale, undertaking four sorties on his first day of operations (on the 20th).

About two weeks before the Inchon Landing UN forces had secured a firm grip on the Pusan Perimeter, mainly due to air power preventing reinforcements and supplies from reaching the North Korea frontlines. In an attempt to defend mobile targets most of the communist troops on the ground used pistols, rifles and machine guns, or anything else they could get their hands on, to shoot at the aircraft. Hand-held weapons were effective up to about 3000 ft, and whenever possible pilots flew at that altitude or higher. Unfortunately, there was no way they could maintain that altitude and still be effective at hitting targets with pinpoint accuracy, which meant that pilots often had to attack targets from low altitude. Only one hit in the right place was needed to bring down an F-51.

The Pusan Perimeter was declared secure on 12 September because of all the Mustang and F-80 attacks. This freed the B-26s and B-29s for two solid nights of interdiction. By the 14th all major movements of KPA military supplies had been curtailed by UN air power. No 77 Sqn had been working overtime during this period flying sorties against targets around Inchon and Seoul in preparation for the Inchon Landing by the US Marine Corps on 15 September. With Lt Gen Walton Walker's Eighth Army bursting out of the Pusan Perimeter and the Marines liberating Seoul, the rout of the KPA was set.

On 9 October UN forces crossed the 38th Parallel and the decision was made to relocate No 77 Sqn to Pohang. This would reduce the distance for a mission from Iwakuni to North Korea by at least 300 miles. The move started on the 10th and had been completed within 48 hours, with the Australian squadron being accommodated in the 35th FBG billeting area. Although the squadron lost its autonomy as part of the move, its combat role was enhanced.

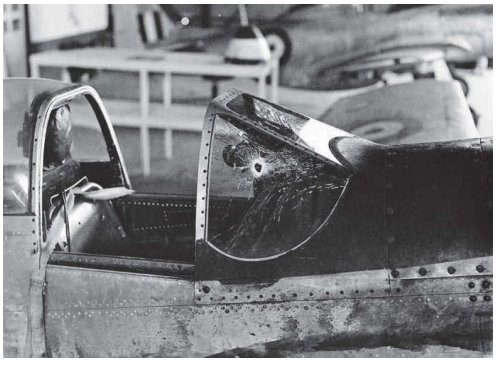
Pyongyang was captured on 19 October, and with this No 77 Sqn was tasked with escorting C-119 Packet transport aircraft that were dropping paratroopers 30 miles north of the city in an effort to cut off the retreating enemy.

By the end of October the KPA had begun a last-ditch stand in the vicinity of Chongjin. UN ground forces had their hands full holding their territorial gains, and Fifth Air Force staged a massive effort to come to their aid. On 3 November elements of the PVA attacked the Anglo-American 27th Brigade, and No 77 Sqn was called in to provide air cover for Australian Army troops. From their lofty perch, pilots watched the action on the ground. They knew exactly where the Chinese troops were, and strafed them until their losses became so heavy that they panicked, jumped out of their foxholes and presented much easier targets for the Mustang pilots.

No 77 Sqn inflicted further casualties on the PVA on 18 November, when a battalion from its 41st Division entered the combat arena for the first time. It was quickly set upon by several flights of Mustangs that pounded the communist ranks until the troops surrendered. This was the first time that a ground unit of this size had capitulated as a result of Mustang attacks. Later that same day the Chinese 113th Division came under fire by more No 77 Sqn aircraft. Four Mustangs and three B-26

Invaders joined in an attack on 50 trucks carrying about 50 men each, and on an additional 50 trucks loaded with supplies. All of them were destroyed.

When the PVA entered the war, in November 1950, snow blanketed North Korea. This made it hard for Mustang pilots to gauge just how many communist troops had streamed over the border from China as they were all clothed in white. As No 77 Sqn scoured the countryside for targets during daylight hours, the PVA quickly realised that it could only move with any safety at night – its troops remained camouflaged during the day.



The dangers of low-flying CAS missions! This Mustang from No 77 Sqn had both of the side panels in its windscreen shattered by a single bullet. Flg Off A K Frost had a lucky escape, the round narrowly missing him as he dived down to attack an enemy truck in early 1951 (*RAAF*)

However, on one flight near the Chosin Reservoir before the major fighting in this area began, Wg Cdr Dick Cresswell and his flight saw a 'white movement' in a snow-covered depression a little over a mile wide. It turned out to be thousands of Chinese soldiers in white uniforms moving slowly towards American troops in the area. The Australian pilots had already exhausted their ammunition, so all they could do was relate what they had seen, and target coordinates, to the local air controller, who called up USAF and US Navy aircraft to attack the Chinese. No 77 Sqn pilots also reported to Fifth Air Force Intelligence that 12,000-15,000 Chinese troops were expected in that area.

Although Gen MacArthur paid a visit to Pohang the next day, during which he repeated his 'home for Christmas' prediction, reality set in on 25-26 November when the Chinese launched a massive attack against the RoK division in the middle of the UN lines.

A few days later (on the 29th) a flight of No 77 Sqn Mustangs was heading over the mountains at 11,000 ft, bound for a strike against targets on the Yalu, when they spotted 200-300 PVA troops, dressed in white, on horseback. The riders waved to them, thinking they were friendly. It took the pilots only a few seconds to expend their ordnance, wiping out the enemy cavalry. Having thus spent all their munitions, the RAAF pilots had to give up on the Yalu targets and return to their base at Hamhung to rearm.

Flying at night in snow-covered mountains was rarely done by Mustangs pilots due to the incredibly dangerous nature of such missions in an aeroplane without any form of radar. However, on one snowy night Wg Cdr Cresswell took his flight up to the Chosin Reservoir, where UN troops desperately needed CAS. Once they were over their objective the controller directed them to Chinese troops camped with fires burning and making so much noise that the air controller could hear them while airborne – clearly they thought that there was little chance UN aircraft would be aloft in such conditions at night. He relayed target details to the RAAF pilots, who destroyed the camp. With a low cloud base and no moon, there was no way the communist soldiers could have been expecting an air attack.

The arrival of new pilots brought squadron numbers up to 36, which gave it 50 per cent over-manning to allow for further losses and future postings. The weather conditions in early 1951 slowed the operational tempo right down, resulting in a fairly low flying rate. Indeed, some pilots were sent back to Australia during this period after their mandatory six months in action (tour lengths were the same for all Mustang units) having flown just 50 missions.

Following a large-scale Mustang attack on an area southeast of Seoul on 29 January 1951, fighter pilots of the 35th FBG and No 77 Sqn are thoroughly interrogated on the results of the mission. In the largest strike of its kind since the start of the Korean War, all three units within the 35th FBG (including No 77 Sqn) contributed 12 Mustangs apiece to the mission (*USAF*)

The advent of the MiG-15 over North Korea from late 1950 ended the Mustang's effectiveness at medium and high altitudes. Henceforth, the fighter would require support from jets flying as top cover. In an attempt to allow No 77 Sqn to defend itself against the communist jet scourge, on 24 February 1951 the Royal Navy carrier HMS *Warrior* arrived in Japan with 15 single-seat Gloster Meteor F 8s and two two-seat T 7s as deck cargo. These were destined to replace the older Mustangs and bring No 77 Sqn into the jet age. During March another 22 Meteor F 8s were delivered, along with more two-seaters.

No 77 Sqn was finally relieved of frontline duties on 6 April 1951 in order to commence its transition to the Meteor. By then there was only one flight of Mustangs left in Korea, and immediately prior to it being pulled back to Iwakuni pilots flew one last mission against communist trucks between Koksan and Singye – all vehicles were destroyed. By the end of that week the entire squadron was back in Japan.

During its nine-month period of F-51 operations, No 77 Sqn had flown 3800 combat sorties – an average of 400+ per month. It had lost ten pilots in combat and another four in miscellaneous accidents, while one had become a prisoner of war. No 77 Sqn had been one of the first Mustang-equipped units committed to the conflict, and it had particularly proven its worth during the defence of the Pusan Perimeter.

Looking less than pristine, a No 77 Sqn Mustang is seen in the process of being rearmed by Korean and 35th FBG personnel at Taegu in March 1951 (*RAAF*)

No 2 SQN SAAF

As previously mentioned, when the F-80C-equipped 18th FBG was committed to the Korean conflict in July 1950, it posted two of its units (the 12th and 67th FBSs) in from the Philippines and re-equipped them with F-51Ds. The group's third squadron, the 44th FIS, remained at Clark AB, with its F-80Cs providing local air defence. The 12th and 67th were some of the first squadrons to fight in Korea, and in early December 1950 both units began operations out of Chinhae. Just days earlier, No 2 'Cheetah' Sqn, South African Air Force (SAAF) had been brought into the 18th FBG fold, and it remained with the group for the duration of the war.

A total of 50 officers and 157 other ranks had sailed from Durban on 26 September 1950, bound for Yokohama, Japan, where they were welcomed by the Americans. Like the 12th and 67th FBSs, No 2 Sqn had been issued with Mustangs brought over onboard *Boxer*. Once equipped with a sufficient number of aircraft, and having completed their conversion onto the F-51, pilots from the unit ferried their fighters to Pusan East AB on 16 November. Three days later, two SAAF pilots took off together with two USAAF pilots to fly the first South African combat sorties of the war.

Shortly thereafter the unit travelled north to Pyongyang East (K-24), from where it would perform general reconnaissance, fighter escort duties to B-26 and B-29 bombers and CAS for ground troops. Although North Korean bases were close to the frontline, there were a number of problems facing units operating from these airfields. They were a long way from operational control in Seoul, and many of the mission updates and intelligence briefings provided to units in the north were often short on detail and late in arriving. Communist guerrillas were also operating behind UN lines, and they inflicted casualties in and around Pyongyang from time to time. For this reason local labourers were denied access to both of the major airfields – Pyongyang (K-23) and Pyongyang East (K-24) – in the North Korean capital.

The winter weather in late 1950 drained groundcrews struggling to cope with the intensity of operations (as a result of the Chinese invasion) from the advance airfields in and around Pyongyang. The days were short, and the first wave of sorties commenced at about 0645 hrs, with the last flight taking off about 1915 hrs. This meant that groundcrews had to start their day at about 0500 hrs in order to warm up frozen engines.

One of the main duties allocated to No 2 Sqn SAAF during this period was to provide support for the Eighth Army in western North Korea, which had been confined to a narrow strip of land between the UN frontlines and the Manchurian border. Although problems with communication between units on the ground and aircraft from the FEAF hampered any opportunity for effective interdiction at the time, the fighter-bombers were ordered to reduce the flow of enemy supplies and reinforcements by carrying out armed reconnaissance missions throughout the area.

The 'Cheetah' Squadron launched seven sorties on 21 November, which enabled its pilots to become familiar with the procedures of patrolling the communication routes to the north of the frontlines while looking for targets of opportunity, and especially for any movement by Chinese troops. With only a small area to cover, the sorties lasted from one-and-a-half to

two hours. During one of the missions on 7 December a flight flew over warehouses and a school that had been targeted by an earlier formation of SAAF F-51s. Hit with napalm, the school had erupted in a brilliant explosion – it was clearly being used as an armoury.

The next day a two-aircraft element stumbled across a self-propelled gun and two support trucks, which they quickly knocked out before moving on to a nearby supply dump. Although the Chinese were pouring in tens of thousands of winter-camouflaged troops, which were difficult to spot from the air against snow-covered ground, it was not so hard to identify trucks and tanks. Indeed, once the Chinese were on the move it was easy pickings.

On several occasions the 'Cheetahs' were called on to prevent troops from being ambushed by the Chinese, who had infiltrated retreating UN ground forces and thrown up roadblocks across the escape routes. A No 2 Sqn flight was sent out to break up just such an obstacle that had been erected in some of the most rugged terrain. They were in touch with Tactical Air Control, which steered them to a target just south of the major railway line/road junction of Kuni-ri. The PVA had set up two roadblocks to ambush UN troops who were moving south, the Chinese occupying firing positions in a building that ran parallel with the railway, and which was also near the main road and a railway bridge.

Two Mustangs set up the attack and bombed and rocketed the building. At the time, UN troops were a short distance from the railway bridges, but due to the thoroughness of the attack they never came under enemy fire. Many of the Chinese troops were killed, and the only ground fire the two Mustangs received was small calibre. As the SAAF pilots left the area they received a congratulatory message from the commander of the UN forces below. They had saved a lot of lives, and this type of mission would be performed countless times until the frontlines were stabilised.

In a first for the FEAF in Korea, the South Africans and the 12th and 67th FBSs operated right from the start as a single striking force. According to most of the pilots involved, this arrangement proved to be a great success, with SAAF and USAF personnel being highly complimentary of each other's fighting capabilities. One high-time Mustang pilot from the 18th declared, 'When they first joined, we Americans were a little dubious, but before long they were considered to be just like everyone else'. The South Africans stated that, initially, there were some minor differences in flying techniques, but they were soon solved and everyone then flew alike.

Capt Lewis Page, a veteran with the 18th FBG, recalled that his contemporaries in No 2 Sqn SAAF were 'great pilots'. He and his fellow Americans were particularly impressed with their 'cost consciousness', noting that they were very careful about hitting the target – they clearly did not like to waste their bombs. 'In fact,' he said, 'they were the only people who ever

Just a few hundred yards beyond No 2 Sqn's primary base at Chinhae was a small island, and every now and then F-51 pilots would use it as a target to demonstrate the effects of napalm, as seen here in February 1951. No 2 Sqn painted the spinners of its fighters in different colours depending on which flight they were assigned to (*Tom Shockley*)

brought their bombs back with them, but you could take a thing like that too far!' Indeed, it was considered dangerous to land a bomb-laden aircraft.

The South Africans seemed to like the Mustang better than the Americans did. As a fighter-bomber, they preferred it to any type of jet aeroplane being used in Korea at the time. South African pilot Capt John Bolitho, who flew 54 missions in a Mustang, said that although the F-51D was not as good an interceptor as the Spitfire he had flown in World War 2, it was the best fighter-bomber in Korea.

All the SAAF pilots in-theatre were volunteers, and a few of them had exclusively flown as fighter pilots before they arrived in Korea. However, they all adapted quickly to the CAS role. They were supposed to fly only 75 missions before they rotated home, but most of them volunteered for an extra 25 missions, thus completing 100 sorties before leaving Korea.

On 5 December the first SAAF aircraft was lost when No 2 Sqn attacked a railcar that turned out to be loaded with explosives. The resulting blast knocked the pilot temporarily unconscious, and when he regained his senses he was forced to crash-land his battered fighter. An American L-5 aircraft later landed on a narrow road near the crash site and was able to rescue the pilot.

The squadron flew numerous sorties to assist the hard-pressed ground forces during this period, but it was continually moved back to new bases as the communist advance continued. Despite the all-out air offensive, UN troops were pushed back to Seoul, and on 6 January 1951 they abandoned the city and moved further back to pre-arranged defensive positions. The air attacks were intensified and the aircraft found that they were subject to an increasing amount of ground fire from communist forces. In February at least three SAAF aircraft were lost as a result of small-arms fire while strafing enemy vehicles and troop positions.

On 1 March No 2 Sqn flew 32 sorties in one day, establishing a new record for the 18th FBG, destroying seven vehicles and two tanks, but at the same time losing two more pilots. The SAAF unit was by now fully integrated into the USAF group and it was building a reputation for operational skill and aggressiveness.

One of the squadron's best pilots at this time was Lt Alexis 'Topper' van der Spuy, a Spitfire veteran from World War 2 and a future Boeing 747 pilot with South African Airways. In late March 1951 he led a four-aircraft flight against a prearranged target that had been spotted for them by a 'Mosquito' pilot. Several vehicle revetments and personnel shelters had been seen from the air, and the Mustang pilots were employing napalm, rockets and 0.50-cal ammunition to knock them out. Using the markers put down by the 'Mosquito' pilot, they expended all of their ordnance on the targets and received a rating of 85 per cent weapons effectiveness – a very good result against targets that were widespread over a large area. No fewer than 80 personnel shelters were obliterated. All four Mustangs went in at treetop level, which contributed to their effectiveness.

By 12 April the squadron had flown 2000 sorties against the enemy, and received a letter of appreciation from Lt Gen George E Stratemeyer, Commanding General of the FEAF. Lt Gen Earle E Partridge, Commander of the Fifth Air Force, also complimented the South Africans on their 'outstanding performance'.

Rated as one of the best pilots in No 2 Sqn in 1950-51, Lt Alexis 'Topper' van der Spuy had previously flown 161 combat missions in Spitfires with the unit in North Africa and Italy in 1943-44. Having volunteered for combat in Korea, he completed a further 67 missions before pilot error saw him crash-land his Mustang shortly after takeoff. Van der Spuy completed one more combat sortie prior to being posted back to South Africa by his CO, who believed he was suffering from combat fatigue (*SAAF*)

The pilot of Mustang '332' prepares to wave the wheel chocks away to signal the start of yet another combat mission from Chinhae on 1 May 1951. As with most 18th FBG fighter-bombers, the aircraft is armed with napalm canisters and 5-in rockets, as well as a full load of 0.50-cal ammunition (*SAAF*)

For a short period in the spring of 1951, No 2 Sqn SAAF gave up the use of napalm in favour of 500-lb GP bombs. This change was made when the unit was tasked with specifically targeting the road system in North Korea – such missions were referred to as 'post-holing'. During one such operation on 14 April two 'Cheetah' pilots were patrolling around Songwol-ni when they spotted a camouflaged convoy of 19 trucks, which they set upon and destroyed. Left with unused ammunition, they proceeded up into the area northeast of Sinmak, where they found three more trucks that were evidently loaded with ammunition because the Mustangs' 0.50-cals caused them to explode. The pilots were opposed on both occasions by truck-mounted 20 mm AAA batteries until they too were destroyed by the Mustangs.

On 22 April the communists launched another major offensive, throwing 70 divisions at UN forces and forcing the latter to withdraw in some sectors of the front. By the end of the month the attack had petered out, however, primarily thanks to the efforts of the FEAF in disrupting enemy transport and destroying supply dumps. On 9 May, for example, a huge strike consisting of 300 aircraft took place on the communist airfield at Sinuiju. No 2 Sqn's Maj J P D 'Jannie' Blaauw (a Hurricane pilot in World War 2 and future CO of the squadron) was awarded the American Silver Star for the part he played in protecting and rescuing a downed pilot on that date. By 22 May the communist offensive had collapsed and by early June UN forces had recaptured all the territory they had lost in South Korea.

No 2 Sqn Mustang '328' was photographed at Hoengsong AB waiting for its pilot in the late summer of 1951, having been armed with a full load of napalm, 5-in rockets and ammunition for the next mission. Note the unit's 'Flying Cheetah' emblem just below the cockpit – a marking that adorned all No 2 Sqn F-51s (*Tom Shockley*)

On 24 June Lt G H Marshall earned himself an American DFC when he led three other Mustangs in an attack on enemy troops that were poised to overrun a position held by US Marines. One of the latter subsequently recalled;

'We were catching all hell because of an overwhelming communist counter-attack. The tide of battle was leaving casualties in its wake like seashells cast upon a beach. It was then we saw four silvery streaks plummet from the skies with guns blazing. It was so wondrous a sight we completely forgot our whereabouts or line and just stood up in our foxholes and cheered. The Hall of Fame does not possess any greater men than those who flew that day.'

In July, with the start of peace talks, the air war entered a new phase that saw the emphasis shift from CAS to maintaining air superiority. On 8 July No 2 Sqn had its first encounter with MiG-15s, but the Mustang pilots beat them off by turning in to meet them head on when they tried to attack. A major new offensive was launched by UN forces on 18 August, and this kept No 2 Sqn extremely busy. Indeed, on 25 September the unit flew 40 sorties in a single day – the highest number since its arrival in Korea. By November 1951, when No 2 Sqn marked its first anniversary in Korea, the unit had completed 4920 sorties. During these missions it had destroyed more than 2000 buildings, 458 vehicles, 14 tanks, 13 bridges and numerous other targets, but at a cost of 36 of the 61 aircraft assigned to it.

On 20 March 1952 the squadron had its second encounter with MiGs when a flight of four Mustangs was bounced by five fighters, resulting in an F-51 being shot down and a MiG claimed as damaged. By now the communists had positioned flak batteries along all their railway lines, making air attacks extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, such missions were increased in order to put pressure on the communists during the peace talks.

There is no doubt that No 2 Sqn did more than was expected of it during the conflict in Korea. This was particularly the case in August 1952, when Capt William Juhrs brought a lot of attention to both himself and the 18th FBG. Flying as the No 2 man in a flight of four F-51s pre-briefed to attack a target near Kumwha, he spotted a large number of Chinese troops massing to attack UN forces in the area. Juhrs descended through a hail of enemy ground fire that blanketed the target area, and dropped his bombs with perfect accuracy, scattering the troops and breaking up the attack. As the enemy soldiers attempted to hide, Juhrs returned again, strafing and rocketing with complete disregard for his personal safety. The evaluation by FACs for this attack was 100 per cent coverage of the target and 100 per cent effective use of ordnance. For this mission Capt Juhrs and the flight received a commendation from the commander of the Ninth Army, stating that the attack saved numerous friendly lives and broke the enemy's efforts.

War-weary F-51D '334' was something of a rarity in No 2 Sqn in that it boasted a nickname – *GAY JANE II* – on its nose. Although USAF Mustang units liberally plastered their aircraft with names and nose art, UN units tended to be a little more discreet when it came to personal markings (*Russell Bunn*)

South African pilots were very aggressive when it came to performing the CAS mission. As if to prove the point, in February 1952 this No 2 Sqn Mustang was hit several times by high-calibre AAA rounds as its pilot delivered his ordnance from low level. Despite his fighter having suffered severe damage to its wingtip and tail, he managed to fly the aircraft back to Hoengsong (*James Harris*)

On one mission during the summer of 1952 SAAF pilots came across an enemy tank in the open. Having exhausted their underwing stores earlier in the flight, the pilots could only strafe the tank with their 0.50-cal weapons. Once out of ammunition, they returned to base, while another flight whose Mustangs were armed with rockets was sent aloft to finish the job. When they reached the damaged tank it had been loaded onto a large trailer-type retriever. The pilots lined up the tank and retriever and hit them with their rockets, destroying both targets. Several other missions that week resulted in numerous reports of damaged or destroyed tanks.

The increasing appearance of MiG-15s as 1952 came to an end led to No 2 Sqn finally being re-equipped with F-86F Sabres – pilot conversion courses commenced in Japan in November. The last of 10,373 sorties flown by SAAF Mustangs was undertaken on 27 December, by which point No 2 Sqn had lost 74 of the 94 F-51s assigned to it. Twelve pilots had been killed in action flying Mustangs, 30 posted missing in action and four wounded.

F-51D '345' was one of the last Mustangs still in use with No 2 Sqn in late 1952, the veteran fighter being replaced by an F-86F in December of that same year. By then the unit had flown more than 10,300 sorties with the F-51, and had lost 74 of the 94 F-51s assigned to it during two years of constant combat (*Herb Pederson*)

RoKAF

Although the RoKAF was the first air arm to fight in the Korean War, for the first few days of the conflict it flew mostly reconnaissance missions with a handful of Piper L-4s, Vultee-Stinson L-5s and North American T-6s. It was given ten F-51s shortly after the KPA invaded in June 1950, these aeroplanes being picked up from Itazuke and used to equip No 1 Sqn. The RoKAF's first sorties were flown on 3 July, when it took on the KPA's 4th Mechanised Division as it advanced from Yeongdeungpo towards Suwon. The second flight of Mustangs took on the enemy's nearby fuel supply train and then attacked vehicles in the area, killing up to 30 KPA troops.

The following day, close to Anyang, RoKAF Mustang pilots spotted a lengthy line of enemy vehicles being led by 20 T-34 tanks. One of the pilots, a Col Lee, was hit by ground fire and, realising that he could not make it back to base, he dived into one of the leading tanks. He had sacrificed his life to save Korea. After this loss, the President of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, publicly thanked the nine surviving pilots from the F-51 programme for their efforts in the face of overwhelming odds. He also told them that since a fighter pilot needed about 1000 hours in the Mustang to have a better than average chance of survival, he would recommend that the incoming USAF 'Bout One' pilots should take over the job of defending South Korea so that the RoKAF could continue to train its aviators.

At a meeting a few days later, the Fifth Air Force Commander, Lt Gen Partridge, gave permission for the RoKAF to fly in formation during their training, and stated that No 1 Sqn must adorn its aircraft with the national symbol on all of the surviving F-51s from the original batch supplied.

The RoKAF subsequently played a major part in the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter and the advance into North Korea. Operating from bases near Pyongyang, the RoKAF units were some of the last to leave when UN forces began retreating following China's entry into the war. In April 1951, the missions flown against the PVA covered the entire front from the west coast to the east coast. At that time No 1 Sqn had only eight Mustangs available, but by the end of April its force strength had increased to 21.

By the summer of 1951, following a year of advances and retreats, both sides had taken up defensive positions pretty much where the war had originally started. The communists soon began bringing in numerous anti-aircraft guns, and concerns about the vulnerability of No 1 Sqn's F-51 operations increased. In response to the proliferation of AAA batteries, the RoKAF started using

The RoKAF started the conflict with just ten Mustangs and by July 1953 it had 78. During the first half of the war Korean pilots were primarily restricted to flying training missions (although some combat sorties were indeed flown during the early weeks of the conflict) as they learned their craft from USAF instructors. By the second half of the war the RoKAF's No 1 Sqn was an independent force, just as the SAAF and RAAF units had been before it. The RoKAF lost 39 Mustangs in combat operations and another 29 during the training process (*Zach Ryall*)

napalm to destroy the gun positions. This caused fires that created a lot of smoke, and some of the Mustangs were thus partially concealed as they made their passes. The flights of Mustangs attacked the gun positions first, and after taking most, if not all, of them out, they began to strafe their original targets.

When the PVA's offensive route switched from the eastern to the western Front on 1 May 1951, RoKAF F-51s undertook 261 sorties over 39 days. Records show that No 1 Sqn killed 131 Chinese troops and destroyed 26 bridges and numerous ammunition and supply depots. Its biggest contribution at that time was the firing of 4,300,000 0.50-cal rounds.

To see just how much the RoKAF had joined in the UN fight to save the country, it is necessary to go back to the first days of the war, and assess its contribution until the end of July 1953. In June 1950, its frontline strength consisted of 22 L-4 and L-5 liaison aircraft, two T-6s and the ten F-51s. For the first 16 months of the war (25 June 1950 through 10 October 1951) it had fought not as an independent fighting unit but as an element in training under the USAF. During that training period it flew with the USAF's 6146th Air Base Unit to gain combat experience. In October 1951, the 10th FG, of which No 1 Sqn was the key component, was organised in such a way that it could now fly combat missions without the assistance of American pilots. From then until war's end it carried out operations as a separate independent combat unit under UN command.

At dawn on 11 October 1951 F-51s of the 10th FG took off on an historical mission against the KPA's rear area. This was the first independent sortie flown by the South Koreans. It was planned in conjunction with the FEAF's Operation *Strangle*, a massive offensive designed to interdict enemy railway networks and supply routes north of the 38th Parallel. The 10th FG's CO led aloft a four-aircraft F-51 flight, with each aircraft carrying two 500-lb bombs, four rockets and 1850 rounds of 0.50-cal ammunition. The pilots' target was the 66th Red Chinese Field Army. However, while en route to the target they spotted a small enemy convoy, and within minutes they had destroyed it.

One of the most important missions in which the RoKAF was involved occurred in mid-January 1952. The Fifth Air Force was spending a lot of time attacking the Seoul-Sinuiju and Manchurian-Jinnampo railway lines, which were the main means of transporting goods to the central and eastern fronts. A key feature of these lines was the Seunghori railway bridge, about six miles east of Pyongyang. Because of its importance the Chinese had built a bypass bridge 200 yards away and surrounded it with heavy AAA batteries. The Fifth Air Force had just about given up trying to put it out of business, having many other targets to deal with. The bridge had proved impossible to knock out owing to the size of the nearby workforce that could repair it in hours overnight. FEAF's Joint Operations Center passed the mission to the RoKAF, and it was assigned to the Mustang pilots of the 10th FG.

On 12 January a flight of five Mustangs with full loads of ordnance headed for the bridge. Heavy anti-aircraft fire greeted them as they attacked the target with rockets and machine gun fire, and on a second pass they dropped ten 500-lb bombs on the bridge. All missed and went into the water, but the rocket attacks damaged the railway track crossing the bridge. At 1400 hrs another three-aircraft Mustang formation attacked the bridge, although it too

failed to do any damage. When the pilots returned to base they were gathered in a meeting, where it was decided that the tactical doctrine established by the USAF was useless for this mission. They realised that they had to lower the required altitude from 8000 ft to 4000 ft, and that the bombs should be dropped from 1500 ft. This made the task much more dangerous for the pilots, but they were determined to destroy the bridge at any cost.

Temperatures were below freezing at Kangnung (K-18) on the morning of 15 January as the groundcrews made their final inspection. For this mission, two flights of three aircraft each would be sent. As the six Mustangs approached the target area they came under heavy anti-aircraft fire. Glancing down at the bridge below, the pilots wondered how all those attacks by the Fifth Air Force had failed to do the job. They lowered their Mustangs' noses and headed for the target. The first wave was armed with rockets, which they fired at almost point-blank range, and smoke rose up from the bridge. The second wave approached the target at regular intervals with 500-lb bombs and more rockets, while the first wave climbed up to protect the remainder of the attack force.

As pilots from the first wave circled the target at a higher altitude they saw that two of the spans had received direct hits, and as the smoke cleared they spotted two large holes in the centre of the bridge. They had done the job. The report on the mission showed that the six Mustang pilots had used 12 bombs, 20 rockets and 4700 rounds of 0.50-cal ammunition to destroy two spans of the concrete and steel railway bridge, six gun batteries and several small targets in that area. This feat was mentioned at the HQ Fifth Air Force staff meeting on 21 February.

When the Korean War ended, many of the F-51s within the FEAF's inventory were turned over to the RoKAF. This made it the largest Mustang-equipped air force in the world at the time. In fact the Koreans had so many that they could not use them all, so the USAF recalled about a dozen and gave them to the Philippine Air Force. The South Koreans continued to fly the Mustang until 1957, when they were finally replaced by F-86F day fighters and F-86D all-weather fighters.

During the 37 months of the Korean conflict the RoKAF achieved its two main objectives – winning the war and developing an organised air force. During the war the number of RoKAF personnel had multiplied almost six fold, from 1897 to 11,461. The RoKAF received a total of 198 aircraft from allied countries during the conflict, 133 of which were Mustangs – as the USAF's F-51-equipped units switched to jets, their aircraft and spares were sent to the RoKAF. Because of numerous combat losses, only 117 aircraft remained in service at the end of July 1953. The South Koreans flew a total of 8495 sorties, including CAS, armed reconnaissance and 258 air-to-ground strikes. A total of 39 F-51s and 30 light aircraft were shot down.

A flight of RoKAF Mustangs heads back to base at Kangnung at the end of an interdiction mission up north in 1952, the pilots having expended all their external ordnance. No 1 Sqn was the last frontline unit to fly the Mustang in Korea, having received surplus examples from the USAF, RAAF and SAAF (*David Menard*)

CHAPTER FIVE

45th TRS

RF-51D-25 44-84840 of the 45th TRS undergoes maintenance between missions at Taegu in early 1951. This aircraft was shot down by AAA near Yongson-ni on 7 August 1951, its pilot successfully bailing out (*Bill Disbrow*)

When the Korean War started the USAF boasted just one jet-equipped reconnaissance squadron, and it was not based in the Far East. In August 1950 two small units arrived in Japan, to be followed by the 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS). They all subsequently came under the control of the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing (TRW), which consisted of the 15th TRS with RF-80s, the 12th TRS with RB-26s and the 45th TRS with F-51s and RF-51s. The wing's initial commander was none other than Col Karl I 'Pop' Polifka, who was considered to be the foremost reconnaissance man within the USAF.

The 45th TRS was to cover the frontlines with visual and photographic reconnaissance, and it was also assigned to lead fighter strikes. The 67th TRW was responsible for developing, printing and, most importantly of all, interpreting the myriad photographs taken by all of the squadrons. The UN forces were provided with round-the-clock reconnaissance, a service that was sorely needed and highly praised by all units fighting to save South Korea. With the creation of the 67th TRW, the Fifth Air Force now effectively had 'a pair of highly powered binoculars' to ferret out tactical information from a clever and tricky enemy.

The 45th TRS was activated on 3 September at Itazuke AB, and it became operational at Taegu AB in October. Conversion onto the type was carried out in Japan, and obtaining additional F-51Ds was hard because

the fighter-bomber units had top priority at that time. For almost a year the standard issue F-51 did a tremendous job for the 45th, operating alongside dedicated RF-51s. This was just as well, for the loss rate for the latter would prove to be extremely high owing to the low photography passes that pilots made, with very little chance to take any evasive action. As for the F-51s, they continued to be flown on armed visual reconnaissance missions deep into North Korea, and most of the time they had to stay low as this was their only defence against MiG-15s.

It was not until 3 December that the 45th TRS received its first RF-51s. The unit's small cadre of pilots (never more than 15) started training with the aircraft, and they quickly discovered that the Mustangs' cameras had developed some faults during transpacific shipment. The problems were so serious that the cameras had to be completely rebuilt to enable them to operate under combat conditions. Finally, on 27 December 1950, the 45th sent an advance unit to Taegu AB, and the following day the rest of the squadron followed. Just 48 hours after arriving in South Korea the unit flew its first mission – an armed reconnaissance strike behind the main line of resistance. By the end of December the total flying time was 12.5 hours, which was only a fraction of the total Mustang time flown from Taegu that month.

The unit soon got busy, however, and by the end of the conflict the 45th TRS had been committed to every major campaign. The demand for accurate battlefield intelligence was a top priority, and this saw the 45th assigned directly to the 314th Air Division which was the primary USAF command and control organisation created specifically for Korean War operations. At its base at Taegu, and later at Kimpo, expeditious film processing by the squadron was performed once the Mustangs had returned from their missions. These photographs were supposed to be supplied to the Army, who would provide their own photo interpreters to scour the imagery for intelligence. However, as the Army lacked suitably qualified personnel, the USAF initially handled the interpretation needs until additional Army photo interpreters could be flown in from the United States.

On 13 February 1951 Lts James Dolan and 12-victory ace Clyde East completed the 45th TRS's longest flight so far in the war. Their flight logs showed that they had spent close to six hours over enemy-held territory. During this time they photographed the entire railway line between Hoeryong and Tanchon, constantly dodging enemy ground fire during their low-level flights.

About a month after this mission the squadron began experimenting again. The pilots now operated in two-aircraft formations, with one man up high with a good view of the lie of the land and watching for any enemy fire on the ground, while the other stayed low, with his cameras or guns ready to fire. This tactic seemed to work well for a short time, but it eventually went awry when Capt Brown and Lt Jackie Douglas used it. Brown spotted a target and went down to mark its position with his 0.50-cal guns, but as he started to pull out of his dive he flew straight into the ground. He had been hit by a barrage of ground fire and never had a chance to pull out.

During March and April 1951 the 45th started experimenting with new techniques for locating targets. The most effective of these was known

as the 'Circle 10' concept. The idea was for the RF-51 pilot to fly a ten-mile-radius circle around where enemy vehicles had been sighted the night before – primarily by an RB-26 of the 12th TRS, a sister outfit to the 45th TRS. Each pilot was assigned to a specific area, which he got to know like the back of his hand. He would then fly the radius and spot anything that was out of place or had not been there the day before. Chinese camouflage techniques were good, but the trained eye could spot concealed targets.

More than half of the Mustangs assigned to the 45th were armed with six 0.50-cal guns and had no cameras, so their pilots were able to shoot up any targets of opportunity. Capt Maurice Nordlund and Lt Bill Zalinsky were flying conventional F-51Ds on an armed reconnaissance mission when they spotted about 200 enemy troops moving along a narrow mountain road with deep ravines on both sides. It was the perfect place to catch the troops, as they had very few places to hide. The two pilots made several firing passes and were able to keep the enemy pinned down until some 18th FBG Mustangs showed up with napalm and rockets. Observations after all the fighter-bombers had finished making their passes showed that the entire enemy force had been wiped out.

45th TRS pilot 1Lt Joe R Hurst recalled the 'mechanics' of a successful reconnaissance mission, which was followed up by leading dedicated fighter-bombers to the target;

'We would work intermediate distances north of the frontline in the hope of spotting some lucrative enemy positions and equipment. The low man of the element would work down right over the treetops. In that position, we were very vulnerable to ground fire, but you had to get low to spot anything that the enemy had camouflaged. In one case we spotted a large group of T-34 tanks – probably a dozen. We marked the location on our map and returned to the closest base to refuel – Seoul City AB. While waiting for my aircraft to be readied, I briefed two flights [eight aircraft] of South Africans and two flights of 67th FBS pilots. All of these guys were flying F-51s with the 18th FBG.

The pilot of F-51D-30 44-74630 leads his squadronmate in RF-51D-25 44-84909 back south across the 38th Parallel after expending their ordnance on targets in North Korea. 45th TRS pilots typically operated in pairs, with one flying high to spot enemy air activity while the other flew low, seeking targets. Although 44-74630 survived its time with the 45th TRS to be transferred to the RoKAF in May 1953, 44-84909 was brought down by ground fire near Chupa-ri on 5 October 1951. Its pilot bailed out and was rescued (*Harley Fortier*)

'The Mustangs were loaded with 500-lb GP bombs. We led these guys up to the "hidden" tanks a total of three times. The first wave of aircraft in hit all of the AAA emplacements that were protecting this group of tanks and took out all the ground fire. When the dust had settled it was dark, and a total of 32 Mustangs had put their ordnance into the area. It had been one of the longest days that I can remember.'

As the war progressed, the automatic fire from the ground became more intense and very accurate. The T-6 'Mosquito' took more than its share of losses when it penetrated too far behind the bomb line due to its slow speed, so,

1Lt Jackie Douglas poses with his 100-mission horseshoe around his neck. He was one of many 45th TRS pilots who completed the required number of missions prior to returning home. Douglas had a wingman shot down by AAA on an armed reconnaissance mission while flying one of the top/bottom two-aircraft formations employed by the squadron (*Fred Jones*)

consequently, the RF-51 had to take over the low-level deep-reconnaissance mission in its place.

In records released about the first full year of the war, the USAF announced that the Fifth Air Force's fighter-bombers had inflicted 126,000 troop casualties – the equivalent of more than 12 full-strength divisions. It was also announced that fighter-bomber losses for the year due to aerial combat with the MiG-15 amounted to one F-84, three F-80s and a pair of F-51s. Most other losses were attributed to ground fire, which was a constant menace.

POST-STRIKE MISSION

The RF-51 pilots were usually tasked with flying post-strike photographic missions immediately the smoke had cleared so as to gain an accurate picture of the damage inflicted. Without the proof gathered by such flights it was

45th TRS RF-51D-25 44-84835 was photographed at Taegu between missions on 2 July 1951. Originally a straight D-model, this Mustang was converted to RF configuration in Japan prior to being sent to Korea to serve with the 45th TRS. Bearing the nickname *OH-Kay II* on its port side and *"The Thing"* to starboard, it saw considerable action in 1951 – the aircraft was flown several times by Lt Col Boardman C Reed during this period. The Mustang survived its time in combat and returned to the USA to serve with the Arkansas ANG's 154th TRS (*Boardman Reed*)

impossible to tell whether a target needed to be attacked again. 1Lt James Long recalled flying bridge assessments after they had been targeted;

'To fly a visual on each span of a bridge required you to evaluate the damage and record it all whilst flying at 350-400 mph, with enemy gunners shooting at you from all sides. Of course, if you flew up and down the river they could shoot from both sides, and see you coming from some distance away. Alternatively, you could fly across the river at each bridge, but the approach ends were the most heavily defended and you ended up going over each. You were moving so fast there was no way to capture a complete evaluation of one bridge on one trip over, so you always had to make a second pass. The orders read "do this for every bridge". Any pilot who made more than two passes into the face of heavy ground fire was not all there in the brain department. Trying to see all five or seven bridges correctly was impossible if you wanted to live, and a recce pilot that did not return did not furnish any information. So the guys that drew the missions alone just did what they could and then headed home with what they had got.'

On 1 July 1951 Col Karl Polifka, the 67th TRG CO, was killed in action near Kaesong while flying with the 45th TRS and doing what he did best – improving reconnaissance tactics. Although he knew that this particular mission would be a dangerous one due to heavy AAA, Polifka insisted on flying it himself. Earlier that day, at the unit's base at Taegu, F-51 44-74638 (FF-638) had just undergone a rudder change. Lt Col Boardman C Reed of the 45th TRS was to make a quick test flight in the fighter in order to clear it for Polifka's afternoon mission;

'At 1545 hrs I made a short flight up to 5500 ft, did several sharp turns and manoeuvres at 250 mph and then landed – I was back on the ramp just 15 minutes after takeoff. "Pop" Polifka was waiting for me, parachute slung over his shoulder. I quickly signed the Form 1-A, while the crew topped off the tanks – the fighter had already been armed with ammunition before I took it aloft. At the time I didn't realise it, but I had just performed the last landing that FF-638 would ever make.

F-51Ds and RF-51Ds of the 45th TRS are surrounded by RB-26s of the 12th TRS at Kimpo in September 1951. F-51D-30 45-11613 *Linda and Bobby Jr* had originally seen combat with the 35th FBG, which passed it on to the 45th TRS when the group reverted back to F-80Cs in May 1951. The fighter was flown during the autumn of that year by Lt Col Boardman C Reed, although he had inherited it from another pilot (who had given the F-51 its nickname) after he had finished his tour. On 2 November 1951 45-11613 was lost to enemy ground fire during a low-level mission north of the frontline (*Bill Disbrow*)

45th TRS pilots Lts Watts (left) and Taylor share a 100-mission horseshoe to celebrate reaching this milestone. They are wearing their 'Polka Dots' scarves and helmets, this design being the squadron's emblem. Behind them is RF-51K-10 44-12237, which boasts a ten-mission tally in the form of camera silhouettes beneath the cockpit. This aircraft was shot down by ground fire on 31 December 1952 while marking a target near Singo-san, its pilot, 1Lt Frank Salazar, being listed as Missing in Action. He was the last of 12 pilots from the 45th TRS to be killed in action flying Mustangs between 3 March 1951 and 31 December 1952 (*Walt Elflein*)

'Col Polifka took off and flew north to the target area. His F-51 was critically hit by intense ground fire in the radiator coolant area, which was the most vulnerable spot. When "Pop" bailed out, somehow his parachute fouled in the tail assembly and he was tragically dragged to his death. No further details are known, but it was a tremendous loss to all of us.'

The USAF had lost not only one of its greatest reconnaissance pilots, but also the 'father' of modern reconnaissance. Lt Col Reed stated that Col Polifka's combat record as a reconnaissance pilot in World War 2 was without parallel, and that he was probably the best operational professional in the USAF. His place as wing CO was temporarily taken by Col Vincent Howard until seasoned World War 2 combat veteran Col Edwin Chickering was brought in on 31 October.

In March 1952 1Lt Del Toedt and his wingman were on a two-aircraft mission when they found themselves in a situation similar to that in which Capt Nordlund had been involved, but this time it did not turn out so well. Toedt was providing fighter cover for his wingman as the latter targeted enemy supply routes near the frontlines. The wingman made the first pass down a narrow valley, and Toedt saw the Mustang take numerous hits that proved fatal. The aircraft remained in a steep dive and went straight in among several trucks, causing a huge fiery inferno. Toedt circled the area for at least 15 minutes, drawing heavy automatic fire from a ridge. He pulled up sharply, banked in and sprayed enemy trenches until he ran out of ammunition. He then turned to head back to base. Photographs taken several hours later revealed a heavy body count.

On many of these low-level photo-reconnaissance missions an aeroplane would be shot down, especially if the Chinese had heavy-calibre AAA sited in the target area.

In the spring of 1952 Col Chickering began voicing his concerns to FEAF HQ about the 45th TRS's heavy mission tasking despite its ever-dwindling fleet of war-weary F/RF-51Ds. He also stated that maintenance personnel were having difficulty in keeping the majority of their Mustangs in the air. The 45th TRS 'Polka Dots' started making the transition to the RF-80 towards the end of 1952, although still keeping

most of its RF-51s. In an effort to ease the burden on the piston-engined fighter, the unit decided to test the practicability of working Shooting Stars and Mustangs together as a team. The evaluation proved that they could indeed operate together as long as the jets maintained their higher altitude to reduce their heavier fuel consumption.

The photographic results were deemed to be excellent, which was critically important as the wing's main purpose was to provide the US Eighth Army with current frontline photography. The latter wanted at least 3600 negatives created per day, covering frontline positions and ranging as far back as 15 miles behind the lines. One problem the wing encountered was that the RF-80 proved just too fast for its cameras to operate effectively, which resulted in distorted and blurred images. However, when they functioned in conjunction with the RF-51's cameras, the photographs produced were perfect – close-ups would come from the Mustang's cameras and distance shots from the RF-80.

Finally, in early January 1953, the 45th TRS retired its last F/RF-51s in favour of RF-80A/C jets.

This RF-51D, nicknamed *OH-KAYE BABY*, featured a mission tally beneath its cockpit. These usually denoted post-strike bomb damage assessment sorties, the photographs from which typically decided whether a target needed a follow-up attack or not. RF-51Ds were few in number compared with regular F-51Ds, and they were overworked throughout the war – especially on missions flown 100+ miles north of the bomb line. The 45th TRS eventually disposed of its Mustangs, converting to RF-80A/Cs from August 1952 – it continued to fly RF-51s into 1953, however (*Stan E Newman*)

APPENDICES

F-51 MUSTANG AIR-TO-AIR KILLS IN KOREA

PILOT	UNIT	DATE	KILL
1Lt Richard J Burns	35th FBS	29 June 1950	Il-10
2Lt Orrin R Fox	80th FIS	29 June 1950	2 x Yak-9s
1Lt Harry T Sandlin	80th FIS	29 June 1950	La-7
Capt Alma R Flake	67th FBS	1 November 1950	'Yak-3'
Capt Robert D Thresher	67th FBS	1 November 1950	'Yak-3'
Capt Alma R Flake	67th FBS	2 November 1950	Yak-9
1Lt James L Glessner	12th FBS	2 November 1950	Yak-9
Capt Howard I Price	67th FBS	6 November 1950	1.5 x Yak-9
1Lt Henry S Reynolds	67th FBS	6 November 1950	0.5 x Yak-9
Maj Arnold Mullins	67th FBS	5 February 1951	Yak-9
1Lt James B Harrison	67th FBS	20 June 1951	Yak-9

COLOUR PLATES

1
F-51D-25 44-73770 of the 40th FIS/35th FBG, Pusan West AB (K-1), spring 1951

This Mustang spent a lot of time with the 39th FBS and 40th FIS, before moving to the 18th FBG at Chinhae when these squadrons returned to Japan to convert to the F-80C and F-86E, respectively, in May 1951. This profile shows the Mustang with a red nose, which was the squadron colour of the 40th FIS. The aircraft was hit several times by ground fire during its time in Korea, but it made it back to base on every occasion. 44-73770 was regularly flown by Lt Col Tom Shockley from the 12th FBS.

2
F-51D-30 44-74283 of the 80th FIS/8th FBG, Seoul City AB (K-16), December 1950

The 8th FBG was flying out of Itazuke AB when the war started. Its 80th FIS remained equipped with F-80s from start to finish, while the 35th and 36th FBSs did limited time in the Mustang in Korea. A few pilots from the 80th FIS also flew combat missions in Mustangs, including Orrin Fox (two aerial kills) and Harry Sandlin (one aerial kill). This aircraft was one of the few that flew in Korea with the 8th FBG to wear 80th FIS colours. After just two weeks with the group it was turned over to the 18th FBG.

3
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn, RoKAF, Pohang AB (K-3), July 1950

The first Mustangs to fly in the Korean War were the 'Bout One' F-51Ds that were being used to train RoKAF pilots. Crewed by USAF pilots brought over from the Philippines who would eventually serve with the 18th FBG, these aircraft flew missions in support of UN troops pinned down in the Pusan Perimeter. This particular machine is armed with napalm canisters and unguided rockets – a standard weapons load, along with a full load of 0.50-cal ammunition, during this period. The 'Bout One' F-51Ds had been towing targets in Japan for several years prior to their return to action, and were generally in a pitiful state of repair. When President Syngman Rhee visited the unit in the frontline at Pohang AB he christened its pilots the 'Flying Tigers of Korea'.

4
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn, RoKAF, Chinhae AB (K-10), August 1950

One of the original RoKAF Mustangs rushed into action with 'Bout One', this aircraft sustained so much damage during the first weeks of the conflict that it was subsequently declared unfit for combat. The fighter was, however, used in the training programme for RoKAF pilots, being based at Chinhae on the southern tip of Korea. This base soon became home for the 18th FBG. Most of the early RoKAF pilots committed to the war had undertaken some of their training in this aircraft prior to being declared combat capable.

5
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn/10th FG, RoKAF, Kangnung (K-18), autumn 1951

This Mustang was one the first aircraft issued to the RoKAF when it started receiving additional airframes during the course of 1951. Ten of the more experienced South Korean pilots were duly chosen to convert onto the Mustang. This particular aircraft was also one of the first RoKAF examples to start carrying a full load of rockets, and to work far north of the 38th Parallel. By late 1951 the RoKAF was inheriting more and more F-51s from USAF units that were switching to jets, and also those previously flown by No 77 Sqn RAAF, which had converted to Meteor F 8s.

6
F-51D-25 44-73073 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Seoul City AB (K-16), summer 1951

LiZ Plus 3 was assigned to the 12th FBS, its name referring to the pilot's family. During the summer of 1951 it was primarily flown by 1Lt Lee Gomes, who spent most of his time targeting Chinese positions in the frontlines with napalm. Hit by ground fire on a number of occasions, the fighter was flown back to the 18th FBG HQ base at Chinhae for major repairs. In late 1951 44-73073 was transferred to No 2 Sqn SAAF, with whom it became aircraft '370'. On 20 February 1952 the Mustang was lost in action to ground fire.

7
F-51D-30 44-74651 of Col William H Clark, 18th FBG CO, Hoengsong AB (K-46), July 1952

Assigned to the 18th FBG's commanding officer, Col William H Clark, this Mustang was also flown by numerous other pilots in the group. Indeed, several of them flew their 100th, and final, combat mission in this aircraft. The fighter was adorned with the 18th FBG emblem just forward of the cockpit and diagonal command stripes for all three units within the group (including the SAAF's blue/white/orange). On 28 July 1953, one day after the war had ended, 44-74651 was transferred from storage by the USAF to the RoKAF.

8
F-51D-25 44-73038 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1951

One of the ANG F-51Ds brought over onboard the carrier *Boxer* in the autumn of 1950, this aircraft flew many missions against North Korean and Chinese troops. Assigned to the 12th FBS and adorned with the unit's distinctive 'sharksmouth', the F-51 was flown by 1Lt Dale Backman for a time. 44-73088 was shot down whilst strafing on 6 January 1952, its pilot, Capt Bill Elsom, being listed as Missing in Action – his remains were found post-war.

9
F-51D-30 44-74384 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1951

The 12th FBS used this Mustang during the second half of 1951. The 18th FBG was involved in several operations against enemy supply lines leading south out of Manchuria during the autumn of 1951, and on one such mission the group lost at least three Mustangs. The 12th FBS alone claimed a total of 611 enemy vehicles destroyed and 78 damaged in the final months of 1951, most of the unit's success being achieved with 500-lb bombs. Many of the squadron's pilots switched from napalm to bombs during the offensive, thus enabling them to claim more truck kills. Transferred to the 67th FBS in early 1952, 44-74384 was subsequently lost to ground fire on 4 March that same year. Its unnamed pilot reportedly belly-landed the fighter and was seen to get out of his aeroplane, but no trace of him was ever found.

10
F-51D-30 44-74412 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Chinhae AB (K-10), March 1951

Adorned with diagonal command stripes, *Butchie* spent most of its combat time with the 12th FBS flying missions from Chinhae in 1950-51. It is depicted here carrying 500-lb bombs, which the fighter would haul deep into North Korea to attack targets close to the Yalu River. The 12th FBS was very active north of Pyongyang, hunting enemy supply columns and armour. Eventually transferred to the 67th FBS, the fighter was destroyed when it crashed shortly after taking off from Hoengsong AB on 19 February 1952.

11
F-51D-30 44-74840 of the 12th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

This 12th FBS Mustang had long service with the squadron and was flown by many of the unit's pilots. It too undertook a lot of missions up along the Yalu River against hydroelectric plants and enemy airfields. 44-74840 was one of the last Mustangs to leave Korea, destined for Itazuke AB, where the squadron converted to the F-86F in early 1953. The veteran fighter collided on the ground with 45th TRS F-51D-25 BuNo 44-74052 at Itazuke during the conversion period and it was almost certainly scrapped shortly thereafter.

12
F-51D-25 A68-720 (44-84482) of No 77 Sqn, RAAF, Pusan East (K-9), March 1951

No 77 Sqn's Mustangs rarely wore any personal or squadron markings aside from a rank pennant on the aircraft flown by the unit CO and the two flight commanders. All of its fighters, however, had red, white and blue propeller spinners, as seen here on A68-720. Although the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation built 200 Mustangs in Australia, all the aircraft used by No 77 Sqn overseas (both in Japan after VJ Day and in Korea) were built in the USA – the RAAF received a total of 299 P-51D/Ks from American stocks. In action from early July 1950, No 77 Sqn had flown more than 3800 combat sorties at an average of 400 per month by the time it returned to Iwakuni in early April 1951 in order to re-equip with the Meteor F 8. This aircraft survived its use with the RAAF and was handed back to the USAF, only to be passed on to the RoKAF in November 1953.

13
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 2 Sqn, SAAF, Suwon AB (K-13), winter 1950

Mustang '301' was one of the first F-51Ds flown by the SAAF in the Korean War, the aeroplane almost certainly having arrived in-theatre onboard *Boxer*. It did not have an assigned pilot, as the South African aviators usually flew whichever aircraft was available. Like the other units in the 18th FBG, No 2 Sqn favoured arming its Mustangs with a combination of rockets and napalm canisters, although this aircraft is carrying 500-lb bombs instead of the latter. Note the unit's 'Flying Cheetah' emblem just below the cockpit – a marking that adorned all No 2 Sqn F-51s.

14
F-51D (serial unknown) of No 2 Sqn, SAAF, Pyongyang East AB (K-24), December 1950

Mustang '306' was also one of the first F-51s be given to the SAAF, the fighter taking part in the rout of the KPA from 19 November. The unit flew the aircraft from several bases in North Korea, before retreating south following China's entry into the conflict. Flown by a number of SAAF pilots, '306' was finally written off in a crash landing at Chinhae on 30 August 1951.

15
F-51D-25 44-73055 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, August 1950

This F-51D had a long lineage of users, initially being flown in action by 'Contour William' flight of the 8th FG's 35th FBS for a few weeks before being transferred to the 39th FIS/35th FBG. When pilots from the latter group converted to the F-80C, 44-73055 was passed on to the 18th FBG. Surviving its time with the USAF, the fighter was passed on to the RoKAF on 11 September 1953.

16
F-51D-30 44-75002 of the 35th FBS/8th FBG, Tsuiki AB, Japan, August 1950

This F-51D, formerly assigned to the Indiana Air National Guard's 122nd FIG, arrived in Japan onboard *Boxer* in late July 1950 and was quickly prepared for combat in Korea. At the start of the conflict there were 761 Mustangs assigned to ANG units and almost 800 more scattered across the USA in storage. Initially assigned to the 35th FBS, this aircraft was later transferred to the 35th FBG's 39th FIS.

17
F-51D-30 45-11735 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB (K-2), spring 1951

The 45th TRS, initially operating from Kimpo, used both regular F-51Ds and photo-reconnaissance RF-51Ds, although the former outnumbered the latter throughout the unit's time flying the Mustang. *Mari Lou* was used mostly for road reconnaissance, being equipped with 0.50-cal guns and no camera. The main tactic employed by two-aircraft sections from the 45th TFS that were equipped with standard F-51Ds was for one pilot to remain high and the other one to head down low when working the roads. This aircraft was regularly flown by 1Lt Fred Jones in the spring of 1951, the fighter surviving long enough to have its nickname reapplied in gothic script.

18
RF-51D-25 44-84835 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB (K-2), July 1951

Originally a straight D-model, this Mustang was converted to RF configuration in Japan prior to being sent to Korea to serve with the 45th TRS. Bearing the nickname *OH-Kay II* on its port side and *"The Thing"* to starboard, it saw considerable action in 1951 – it was flown several times by Lt Col Boardman C Reed during this period. The aircraft survived its time in combat and returned to the USA to serve with the Arkansas ANG's 154th TRS.

19
F-51D-25 45-11410 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Taegu AB (K-2), summer 1951

Although the 67th TRW operated from Kimpo AB, the 45th TRS flew primarily from Taegu because of its strategic location in the middle of the Korean Peninsula – this gave the unit easy access to both coasts. An aggressive term used by most pilots who saw action in the conflict, *FUJIGMO* stood for 'Fuck You Joe, I've Got My Orders'. The pilot of this aeroplane during the summer of 1951 was a Capt Eldred Sheeler, who flew 100 combat missions the hard way – 54 in 'Firefly' C-47 flareships, four in the RB-26 and 42 in the Mustang.

20
F-51D-30 45-11613 of the 45th TRS/67th TRW, Kimpo AB (K-14), September 1951

During the early months of the war this Mustang was flown by the 35th FBG, but when the group reverted back to flying the F-80C in May 1951 it was turned over to the 45th TRS. *Linda and Bobby Jr* was evidently named for the pilot's wife and child, the Confederate flag painted on the forward fuselage denoting that he was almost certainly from the southern USA. The pilot of this aircraft in the autumn of 1951 was Lt Col Boardman C Reed, although he had inherited the F-51 from another pilot (who had given the fighter its nickname) after he had finished his tour. On 2 November this aircraft was lost to enemy ground fire during a low-level mission north of the frontline.

21
F-51D-30 44-74597 of the 39th FIS/18th FBG, Seoul City AB (K-16), August 1951

SEXY SALLY II was assigned to 39th FIS CO Maj Murrit H Davis, and he flew it on the first of two daring low-level napalm attacks against targets in Pyongyang on 14 August 1951. The first mission went well, he and his wingman releasing their ordnance while flying between tall smokestacks. Moments later Davis's aircraft hit a cable aimed at protecting key industrial sites from attack, sustaining serious damage. Having nursed the F-51 back to base, he was forced to switch to 44-74035 for the follow-up mission later that same afternoon. This time the amount of ground fire encountered by the 39th FIS over the North Korean capital was staggering, and Davis's aircraft took hits in the coolant system and eventually crashed into a hill. His wingmen on the two missions were also killed in action that afternoon. All 39th FIS Mustangs were easily identified by their blue trim and the blue/white spinners. Note that this aircraft also boasted a direction finding loop on its spine.

22
F-51D-30 44-74268 of the 39th FIS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), spring 1952

NOHEROHERE was flown primarily by Capt Devol 'Rocky' Brett, who used it on numerous missions along the Yalu River and also to undertake road reconnaissance over the frontlines. With the 45th TRS struggling to provide sufficient intelligence to FEAF HQ because of being swamped with mission tasking, the 18th FBG offered to help

shoulder the burden. Although the enemy rarely moved during daylight hours by this stage in the war, any changes spotted in the frontline disposition by the 39th's pilots as they flew at low altitude were reported by radio. The final fate of this aircraft remains unrecorded.

23

F-51D-30 44-74383 of the 40th FIS/35th FBG, Pusan West AB (K-1), winter 1950

Bugs Bunny was one of the few Mustangs that served a long stint in Korea both during and after the conflict. Having been taken from the 170th FS of the Illinois ANG, the fighter was shipped to Japan onboard *Boxer* and issued to the 40th FIS – it is seen here with the unit's distinctive red-and-white spinner. 44-74383's principal pilot was Capt Oakley Allen, although the fighter was also flown by several other aviators. It was then passed on to the RoKAF, who returned it to the USAF in February 1952. The aeroplane was later given to the Philippine Air Force.

24

F-51D-25 44-73064 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), summer 1952

1Lt Jake Armstrong of the 67th FBS was assigned this newly-delivered replacement Mustang shortly after it arrived in Hoengsong from the USA with a total flying time of just 32 hours. An aircraft in such a condition was very much the exception in Korea, for most of the F-51s being flown in-theatre were very 'high timers' that required extensive maintenance in order to keep them serviceable. Note that this aircraft's tailwheel has been fixed in the extended position. On 16 May 1953 44-73064 was passed on to the RoKAF. Having survived the war, it was wrecked in July 1957 while still flying with the South Koreans.

25

F-51D-25 44-84898 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

This F-51 bore two names while serving with the 18th FBG, *Connie* on the left side of its nose and *Trudy* on the right. The fighter flew numerous missions just north of the bomb line, laden with napalm and 500-lb bombs; it is armed with the latter here. On 20 June 1953, five weeks before war's end, 44-84898 was transferred to the RoKAF, with whom it continued to fly until written off in an accident on 27 July 1953.

26

F-51D-25 44-84865 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), summer 1952

ALABAMA MOON SHINER was flown by the 67th FBS, its original pilot hailing from Alabama. The Mustang was subsequently flown by several other pilots during its tour with the 18th FBG. Many of the aircraft's missions were against targets near the Yalu River, the F-51 relying on F-86s for fighter cover against locally-based MiG-15s. 44-84865 was transferred to the RoKAF in late 1952, with whom it was still in service when the war ended.

27

F-51D-25 44-73912 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

Although assigned to the 67th FBS at Hoengsong, *Old Hosenose* was also marked up as the aircraft of group CO, Col William Clark – note the diagonal command stripe. The fighter also boasts an 18th FBG fighting cock emblem forward of the cockpit. 44-73912, which was eventually passed on to Capt Bill Fillmann, saw a lot of action in 1952 and early 1953. Indeed, it remained in service until the 67th FBS converted to the F-86F in Japan.

28

F-51D-30 44-74625 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Hoengsong AB (K-46), autumn 1952

Several pilots of the 67th FBS flew *Rotation Blues* from both Chinhae and Hoengsong in 1952-53 – its original pilot was 1Lt Sam Forbert. Another F-51 fitted with a fixed tailwheel, this aircraft was also passed on to the RoKAF (on 13 February 1953) and flew several missions with No 1 Sqn before the war ended in late July 1953.

29

F-51D-25 44-84959 of the 67th FBS/18th FBG, Osan AB (K-55), January 1953

PAT-MAR-CA-CE of the 67th FBS was among the last group of replacement Mustangs to reach Korea. Initially named by the pilot in honour of his family, it was flown by Capt Ralph Costenbader during the final weeks of December 1952. In early January 1953 44-84959 flew one of the last Mustang missions performed by the 67th (from the new 'super base' at Osan), after which it was flown to Japan and placed in storage.

30

F-51D (serial unknown) of No 1 Sqn/10th FG, RoKAF, Kangnung (K-18), spring 1953

This Mustang was a late transfer from the 18th FBG to the RoKAF after the USAF unit had switched to the F-86F. All of the F-51s flown by No 1 Sqn were adorned with individual side numbers, but this particular fighter was flown on at least two missions before it acquired a number. By the early spring of 1953 the only Mustangs still in frontline service in Korea were being flown by the RoKAF, all of the USAF units previously equipped with the venerable fighter having converted to either the F-80C or F-86E/F.

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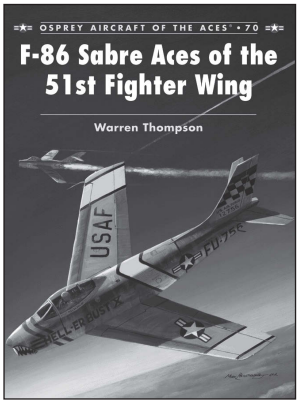

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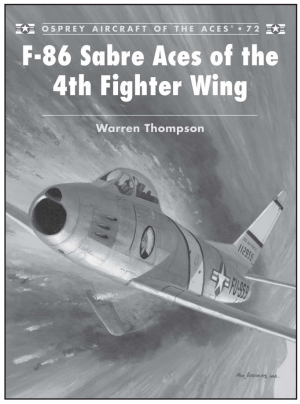

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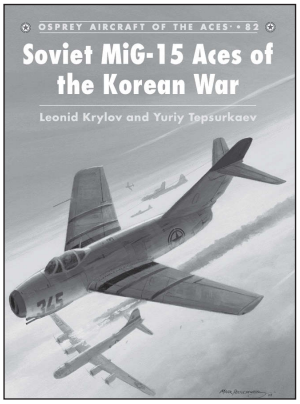

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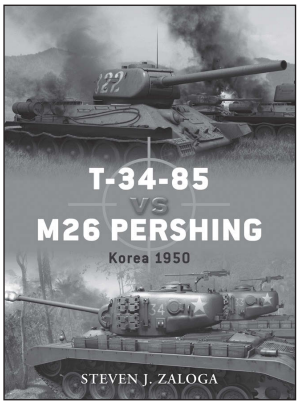

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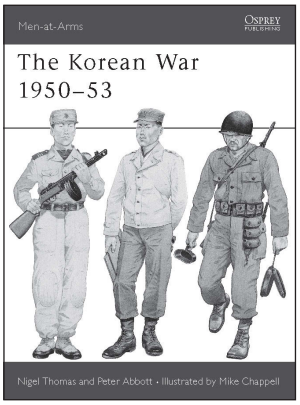

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